

COMING OUT OF OUR SHELLS: SAFETY AND VULNERABILITY IN REALITY STORYTELLING

Sarah Beth Nelson

A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Information and Library Science.

Chapel Hill
2019

Approved by:

Brian Sturm

Renée Alexander Craft

Sandra Hughes-Hassell

Charles Parrott

Ryan Shaw

© 2019
Sarah Beth Nelson
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

Sarah Beth Nelson: Coming Out of Our Shells: Safety and Vulnerability in Reality Storytelling
(Under the direction of Brian Sturm)

Reality storytelling shows are a growing phenomenon across the United States. These shows often take place monthly in bars. Ordinary people volunteer to tell brief, possibly edgy, personal stories. This type of communication presents a unique opportunity for studying embodied information practices. The field of LIS tends to conceptualize information as an object, and discusses information separately from the bodies that interact with it.

Seeking to better understand the reality storytelling phenomenon and embodied information practices, I undertook an ethnographic study of a particular reality storytelling show. Carapace occurs once a month in Atlanta, Georgia. I began with the question: *How does the Carapace community negotiate the making of meaning?* This question was crafted to guide my understanding of the community and their information practices.

I attended six Carapace shows over seven months and conducted 18 interviews. I performed as a storyteller at some of the shows I attended. I found that many of the practices at Carapace focus on creating a safe space for personal storytelling. Tellers are meant to feel safe to share any story they may wish to tell. Audience members are made to feel safe enough to take the risk of hearing any story.

These safeties largely fall into two categories: "the water is fine," and "it's okay to stay in your shell." Organizers and community members try to make the environment generally pleasant. However, because not everything feels comfortable for everyone there, and because

some things are out of their control, they also provide safety by allowing attendees to retreat into the “shells.” This usually takes the form of partially, or completely, disengaging (e.g., avoiding eye contact, leaving the room). When attendees choose to “come out of their shells” they experience moments of connection. The message at the heart of the Carapace experience is “you are not alone.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Within a week of moving to Chapel Hill in 2014, my husband and I discovered that our four-year-old daughter Virginia had head lice, and so did we. Our two-year-old son Horatio seemed to have escaped the lice, perhaps because he still didn't have much hair. In the days that followed I washed and combed Virginia's hair with the lice comb. I washed my hair and tried to comb it. But my hair is long and thick. And you are supposed to *examine* the scalp.

I asked my husband John to help. He was hesitant, because I have so much hair. Then he was out of town, traveling back to Georgia to tend to his legal practice. I was reminded of dialog from the mini-series *I, Claudius* (Wise, 2000). Early in the series, Tiberius is in the bath with his brother. (It's a Roman bath.) They have the following conversation:

Drusus: A man should keep himself clean, not have slaves do it.

Tiberius: And how's he supposed to scrape his own back?

Drusus: He gets his brother to do it.

Tiberius: If he hasn't got a brother?

Drusus: He gets his son.

Tiberius: If he hasn't got a son?

Drusus: Gets his friend.

Tiberius: And if he hasn't got a friend?

Drusus: Then he should go and hang himself.

Tiberius: I've tried it. Better to have a slave scrape your back. (Wise, 2000)

I felt like Tiberius. I had moved away from my sister (and parents, and in-laws). I had no friends in Chapel Hill. Who would comb my hair?

Fortunately, things got better. My amazing family, John, Virginia, and Horatio, agreed to move with me to Chapel Hill in the first place because they believed in me. They were willing to be uprooted so that I could pursue this PhD. We have survived, not only lice, but also fleas

(even though our cats live exclusively indoors), and bed bugs. Chapel Hill has thrown almost every type of annoying insect infestation at us, but still my family sticks with me and believes this whole crazy adventure is worthwhile.

My extended family back in Georgia turned out not to be as remote as they felt at first. My sister, Amanda Sacchitello visited to run the Rock and Roll Raleigh half marathon with me, and came to cheer me on when I ran the full marathon the next year. My mother, Denise Mount has stayed with my kids during that first week of UNC classes because public school starts a week later. She and my step-father Mike also let me stay at their house during my visits to Atlanta for Carapace, carpooled with me to the show, and let me think through my observations aloud.

My mother-in-law Joyce Nelson usually houses us when our whole family travels to Georgia to visit, and keeps me on her prayer list. My late father-in-law Bill Nelson, who was a professor at Georgia State University, passed away before I started this program. I believe he would have been proud to see another academic in the family, while perhaps still asking “why not physics?”

The Carapace community was hard for me to leave behind when I moved to Chapel Hill. However, some of us kept in touch, and they always welcomed me back when I happened to be visiting Atlanta on a Carapace night. I am so grateful to this community for allowing me to come into their space and perform with them as a researcher.

I’ve also made new connections in Chapel Hill. My first friends were my cohort: Samantha Kaplan, Sandeep Avula, Heather Maneiro, and Ze-Kun Hu. Within my first semester at SILS, Sami had volunteered to watch my kids, and Sandeep had bought them candy when I had to bring them to school with me. We try to support each other, from reading each other’s writing to helping each other stay sane while working on a PhD.

My fellow PhDungeon dwellers have made my workspace both productive and friendly, despite the lack of sunlight. Emily Vardell, especially, has been a true friend. As a recent graduate of the program, she continues to give me advice on teaching and the job search. We also share pictures of Pokémon.

The North Carolina storytelling community has also taken me in. Ray Christian introduced me to the local reality storytelling scene, and allows me glimpses of the life of a national reality storyteller. Judith Valerie and I bonded over Boudica. Cynthia Raxter welcomed me and my family to Bynum Front Porch storytelling like a mother hen. And, Sam Pearsall continues to introduce me to new storytellers and opportunities.

Through the National Storytelling Network I have made connections with storytellers all over the United States and beyond. Friends I've made in NSN have supported me through my PhD with their well wishes and enthusiastic belief in me across state lines. NSN also saw enough value in my work to help fund my dissertation research with a Member Grant.

Lastly, but certainly not leastly, my committee has labored with me over this dissertation. Brian Sturm was my first contact at UNC. I was so excited to find a storyteller in the program. His warm presence and gentle guidance have eased my journey. René Alexander Craft taught a Performance Ethnography class so chill I looked forward to it as a calm point in my week. I am delighted she has brought her expertise to my committee. Ryan Shaw agreed to be on the committee, even though I think he at first wasn't sure why I chose him. His suggestions about challenging information theory have helped me better connect this research to the field of library and information science. So, I'll retroactively say, "that's why!" Sandra Hughes-Hassell volunteered to be on the committee and has provided thoughtful comments and encouragement. Charles Parrott and I met at the Atlanta Fringe Festival in 2015. I've been glad to have the leader of the KSU Tellers, someone who understands the Atlanta live-lit scene, as

part of the committee. Charlie has also been quick to respond to my communications, even when they weren't dissertation related, which I so appreciate.

Four-and-a-half years after moving to Chapel Hill, I no longer have to wonder who will scrape my back or comb my hair. So very many people make up my village, helping me raise my children (who are now 9 and 7), tell my stories, and undertake this dissertation. From the bottom of my heart: thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	XIV
CHAPTER 1: AN INFORMATION SCIENTIST WALKS INTO A BAR.....	1
REALITY STORYTELLING.....	2
<i>The Moth.</i>	3
THE QUESTION	4
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE.....	6
REALITY STORYTELLING.....	6
INFORMATION.....	10
<i>Conduit metaphor.</i>	10
<i>Disembodied information.</i>	12
<i>Embodied information practices.</i>	13
<i>Sense-making.</i>	15
CONTEXT: PLACE, SPACE, AND MEDIA	16
<i>The bar.</i>	17
<i>Media.</i>	18
The spoken word and collective unconscious.....	22
PERFORMANCES	27
<i>Types of performance.</i>	27
Stage.	29
<i>Overlapping performances.</i>	30
<i>Backstage behavior and flooding out.</i>	32

CHAPTER 3: STUDYING CARAPACE	35
RESEARCHER AS INSTRUMENT	35
<i>Personal history.</i>	35
<i>Parent.</i>	37
<i>Southern Order of Storytellers.</i>	38
<i>Insider.</i>	39
<i>Commuting.</i>	40
SITE	41
OBSERVATION AND PARTICIPATION	42
ANALYSIS	48
PERFORMANCE	52
CHALLENGES OF METHOD	53
LIMITATIONS	54
CHAPTER 4: CARAPACE AS A SAFE SPACE	56
SPACE	56
<i>The venue.</i>	56
The room.	58
Refreshments	59
<i>The performance space.</i>	60
The stage	61
The microphone.	65
THE RITUAL	66
<i>Performance.</i>	67
It is a performance.	67
It isn't a performance.	71
<i>The rules.</i>	76
Theme.	76

Time limit	79
"No comedy routines, no political rants, no poetry."	83
True and personal.	84
Breaking the rules.	93
<i>The hat</i>	98
<i>The host</i>	103
THE PEOPLE.....	105
<i>The people at Manuel's</i>	105
Highly educated, middle-aged, white people.....	105
Liberals.....	106
Adults.	110
Friends and Frenemies.....	114
<i>Telling and listening to stories</i>	118
The storytellers.....	118
The audience.....	121
CHAPTER 5: THE MESSAGE.....	129
YOU ARE A STORYTELLER / YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL.....	129
YOU ARE SAFE HERE.....	130
THIS IS THE TRUTH.....	131
CHANGE HAPPENS	132
<i>Good and bad are intermingled (fortunately/unfortunately)</i>	133
<i>I learned a life lesson</i>	133
<i>I changed my perspective</i>	134
I found beauty in tragedy.	135
I found comedy in tragedy.	135
I think I am great at X, but a thing happened that suggests otherwise (ironic)	136
<i>I changed my situation</i>	138
<i>I got justice</i>	138

<i>Life is hard (I survived)</i>	139
The truth came out and it was hard.....	140
I lost something (or someone) that can never be regained.....	141
YOU ARE NOT ALONE	141
MEANING.....	142
CHAPTER 6: TURTLES IN THE WATER	143
THE WATER IS FINE, BUT IT'S OKAY TO STAY IN YOUR SHELL	143
<i>The water is fine</i>	145
<i>It's okay to stay in your shell</i>	149
Storytellers in shells.	153
CHAPTER 6: STIMULUS MANAGEMENT AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT	156
STIMULUS MANAGEMENT.....	157
IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT	159
DOING BOTH AT THE SAME TIME.....	161
CHAPTER 7: CONNECTING.....	163
TOUCHING	163
COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS.....	165
CHAPTER 8: CLOSING REMARKS	170
EMBODIED INFORMATION PRACTICES.....	170
LIBRARIES	171
STORYTELLING FESTIVALS	173
BEYOND	175
APPENDIX A: MESSAGE ABOUT STUDY	176
APPENDIX B: LIVE EXPLANATION	177
APPENDIX C: ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION GUIDE	178

APPENDIX D: CARAPACE CREATOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	180
APPENDIX E: CARAPACE ATTENDEE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	182
APPENDIX F: EDITED INTERVIEW GUIDES.....	184
AUGUST 2017 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	184
CRIS GRAY (SEPTEMBER 2017) INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	186
SEPTEMBER 2017 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	188
OCTOBER 2017 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	190
JANUARY 2018 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	192
REFERENCES.....	194

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Information Theory (Day, 2000, p. 806)	11
Figure 2. Georges's Model (Georges, 1969, pp. 320-321)	16
Figure 3. "Reversible goblet" (Colman, 2015, pp. 658-659)	19
Figure 4. Thinking about agents.....	50
Figure 5. Colorful coding of relationships	51
Figure 6. Carapace stage (Carapace, 2017).....	61
Figure 7. Spectrum of Personal Storytelling Performance	75
Figure 8. B. Carr Facebook post on Matan's story	95
Figure 9. Comments on Carr's post about Matan	96
Figure 10. More comments on Carr's post about Matan.....	97
Figure 11. Image of Carapace banner (Carapace, 2011)	144
Figure 12. A person partially shielded	156

CHAPTER 1: AN INFORMATION SCIENTIST WALKS INTO A BAR

It's the second Tuesday of the month, and I drive through Atlanta traffic towards Manuel's Tavern. The GPS has suggested a "faster route," which turns out to go through neighborhoods. I wait in long lines for my turn at multiple four-way stops and then have to make a left turn onto a road where traffic doesn't stop. I curse the technology, under my breath, and slowly make my way there, finally breathing a sigh of relief when I pass the final light and roll into the Manuel's parking lot. Parking is often stressful and expensive in Atlanta, so going to a bar that has its own, free lot feels like a luxury.

I walk in the front door of Manuel's. The bar and a row of booths are directly in front of me. To my right are a couple of arcade games, the bathrooms, and a room that can be closed off for events. I turn left toward another room, reserved that night for Carapace. There is no closing door, just a doorway with a black velvet curtain pulled to the side. There is a paper flier taped beside the doorway that says:

TONIGHT
"CARAPACE"
PERSONAL
STORY TELLING
IN THE MAIN
DINING ROOM!

In spite of my "quicker route" I'm still there by 6pm, an hour early. The room is quiet. A few people dine there, either early for Carapace, like me, or oblivious to the event. Those oblivious will probably be done eating and gone before Carapace begins.

I sit at a small circular table that has been pushed into a line of small circular tables, right in front of the space that will be the stage. Other larger circle and square tables are

arranged around the room. I look at the walls. They are brick with numerous pictures and other objects hanging from them. I notice a framed FDNY jersey, a clown, and a map. There are TVs mounted high on the walls. Currently they are still on, displaying news with subtitles. I inhale air, fragrant and heavy with grease, and my stomach rumbles. I order a burger.

Another regular sits down next to me. His GPS gave him the same "short cut" mine did. The room fills up with people and the sounds of reconnecting, eating, and drinking. People, some shyly, some deliberately, walk up to a small table to write their names on slips of paper and drop them in the top hat.

Around 7pm, the curtains over the doorways close, the TVs turn off, and Cris Gray, the host, steps up to the mic stand. The stand is in the middle of the stage space, but he holds the microphone. "Welcome to Carapace, where ordinary people tell real life stories..."

After his intro, Cris draws the first name. The teller comes to the stage, takes the microphone, and tells a story. Cris draws another name and the show continues, one story after another, with brief comments from Cris in between. I wiggle in my hard, wooden chair, trying to avoid butt numbness. At 8:30 Cris says we're out of time, and invites those whose names are still in the hat to come to the stage and share the first line, last line, or best line from their stories. Cris thanks us, and says goodnight.

There is more conversation as friends say goodbye, as new friendships form over "I loved your story!," as people share untold stories with their table-mates. Slowly the room stops being Carapace space and goes back to just being the dining room at Manuel's.

Reality Storytelling

I call the type of storytelling that happens at Carapace "reality storytelling" for a few reasons. An obvious reason is the reality of the stories. They are true, personal stories. Folk, literary, and otherwise entirely fictional tales are not found at these events.

Going even further than the simple truth of these stories, is that they are authentic. The first time I told a story at a reality event I was accused of using my “storyteller voice.” The audience wants to hear from the performer as a person, not as a third-party intermediary who is uninvolved in the story.

And finally, in a sort of ironic twist, despite their authenticity, or maybe because of it, reality stories are not always technically historically accurate. As Lance Colley, the original host of Carapace used to say, “the stories don’t have to be factual but they must be true.” Like reality TV, reality storytelling is a performance. Performing reality often means editing the facts.

For these reasons (truth, authenticity, and flexible factual accuracy) I refer to this type of performance as “reality storytelling.”

The Moth.

The reality storytelling show that seems to have the most name recognition is The Moth. According to the website:

The Moth was founded [in 1997] by the novelist George Dawes Green, who wanted to recreate in New York the feeling of sultry summer evenings in his native Georgia, when moths were attracted to the light on the porch where he and his friends would gather to spin spellbinding tales. The first New York Moth event was held in George’s living room and the story events quickly spread to larger venues throughout the city. (Moth, 2018)

The Moth hosts storyslams, open mic storytelling competitions, and also curated shows featuring selected tellers performing slightly longer (about 12 minute) personal stories. There are currently regular Moth storyslams in cities across the United States, and a couple regular slams in Australia and the United Kingdom (Moth, 2018). The Moth Mainstage (curated) shows tour the country and the world. Moth stories air on public radio, and on The Moth’s podcast.

Carapace actually began as a Moth show, with the name MothUp Atlanta in 2010. Joyce Mitchell, one of the founders loved The Moth radio show and was looking for a different way to meet new people:

They advertised that they were going to start the MothUps across
the different cities
so I signed up for it right away.
I just pounced
and
signed the paperwork
and put it into motion.

However, The Moth had rules about audience size. The Atlanta show and several
MothUps in other cities “wanted it to be bigger,” according to Joyce.

The gist is
everyone ended up
either getting kicked out or quitting before they were.
We were one of them.
We quit before we
were fired.
We did it on good terms.

The name changed to Carapace and they became an independent show.

In 2017 The Moth returned to Atlanta. Both events coexist, holding their monthly shows
on different nights. Many Carapace regulars also frequent The Moth, but each show also
attracts people who do not attend the other.

The biggest differences between Carapace and The Moth are that The Moth is ticketed
and is a slam (a competition). As Randy Osborne, Carapace organizer, says of Carapace in his
monthly Facebook event posts: “It’s free and always will be, with no judging of any kind.” Both
events are open mic (names drawn randomly); feature true, personal stories connected to the
theme of the evening; and give storytellers a roughly 5 minute time limit.

The Question

Carapace’s host begins the show by sharing the rules:

Storytellers have five minutes to tell a true, personal story on the theme of the evening.
No comedy routines, no political rants, no poetry.
There is no heckling from the audience.

These are all rules for the performer, with the exception of the last one, which asks the
audience to be kind.

Malinowski (1922), observes that there are “rules and regularities of tribal life,” which, although, “crystallised and set, are nowhere *formulated*” (p. 11). Georges (1969) says that storytellers and story listeners have “duties” and “rights” that are “in accordance with socially prescribed rules with which [they] and the other participants in the storytelling event are familiar” (p. 318). McAuley (1999) claims that audience members enter into a “tacit contract” by entering some performance spaces (p. 41).

Some of Carapace’s rules are explicit, but not all of them. The host, for example, does not instruct the performer not to use her “storyteller voice.” The audience is told one of their duties (be kind), but there are others. Regulars come to understand and expect a certain type of story to be told at Carapace to a certain type of audience.

As I set out to better understand the stated and unstated rules of Carapace, what was really going on at this event, I was guided by the question:

How does the Carapace community negotiate the making of meaning?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE

Reality Storytelling

Hannah Harvey describes reality storytelling as being on the “fringe” of the storytelling world, with the traditional festival located at the center. She notes differences in the feel of festival-style telling and reality storytelling: “The evening I went, The Moth featured tales that challenged us deeply -- if traditional festival performances nudge audiences into safe (perilous) adventures, this festival’s stories pushed us into the corners of darkness and forced us to ruminate in that uneasy space” (2008, p. 146). In her observations and research, Harvey sees reality storytelling as allowing listeners to feel negative emotions that festival audiences are shielded from, even in stories that involve “danger.”

Festival audiences have had negative reactions when reality storytelling has been included in the program. Joseph Sobol recounts an incident from the 1985 National Storytelling Festival in which Spalding Gray was a featured teller. Gray’s “dark autobiographical monologues came as an unpleasant shock to some” (Sobol, 1999, p. 198). During the show, Gray used a “four-letter word,” resulting in parents with young children leaving, and young adults moving closer to the stage (p. 198). It was “polarizing.”

Harvey describes a somewhat similar incident in which a Kennesaw State University student used profanity before the audience of the Southern Order of Storytellers Winter Festival:

The event was, in both a literal and metaphoric sense, the perfect storm. That winter, an ice storm had caused several of the weekend sessions of The Southern Order of Storytellers’ Winter Storytelling Festival to be collapsed into the closing ceremonies -- adolescents and adults together shared the space where one KSU [Kennesaw State University] student was gifted with a merit-based scholarship for high achievement in

storytelling studies, generously granted by SOS. Upon winning the storytelling scholarship from SOS, the student proceeded to give a heartfelt and powerful personal narrative story of his mother's suicide. In one moment of the performance, the teller wailed in his grief, "Fuck you, and fuck God!" The performance had been prepared for a mature audience but due to the circumstances, was called to the stage in the presence of both adults and a small number of adolescents. While the teller had been an adolescent at the time he experienced the events he narrated, and the language was fitting with the scene he described, the performance unsurprisingly marked a turning point for members of the sponsoring organization. Factions in favor of more progressive, mature storytelling spaces found themselves in contestation -- often, but not in all cases, along generational lines -- with those who felt there was no place for those words on their stage.

Since that performance, KSU has been greeted with friendly suspicion by some members of the Order." (Harvey, 2008, p. 142)

Both of these unconventional performances (described by Sobol and Harvey) resulted in mountains of feedback from audience members, some very positive, but some extremely negative.

What may make reality storytelling uncomfortable for some listeners is Turner's (1988) "breach." Turner describes breach as

breach of regular norm-governed social relations made publicly visible by the infraction of a rule ordinarily held to be binding, and which is itself a symbol of the maintenance of some major relationship between persons, statuses, or subgroups held to be a key link in the integrality of the widest community recognized to be a culture envelope of solidary sentiments. (p. 34)

A "social drama" begins with a breach (p. 34). Something happens that would not usually happen in that situation. Social dramas lend themselves to becoming personal stories. Reality storytellers are narrating their lives' social dramas.

The breaches they discuss may be especially jarring for audiences, especially when the storytellers behave more the way they did in the moment, than as detached narrators relating the story later. The KSU teller experienced his mother's suicide as a breach. He shared that breach with the audience. He also shared his authentic reaction with the audience by calling out "Fuck you, and fuck God!"

Not only did the audience live this breach with him, they simultaneously lived a breach in the ritual of the storytelling festival. The KSU teller's language and performance were a breach. The combination of these two breaches was too much for them.

Outside the world of festival storytelling, reality storytelling is the only kind of storytelling that many people have heard of. Ben Lille, co-founder and host of Story Collider (a science reality storytelling show), repeatedly uses the term "storytelling" when he is clearly only talking about shows like Story Collider and The Moth in his interview for *Curator* (Linett, 2013). The lack of bracketed notes to clarify suggests that this is not confusing to the magazine readers.

Lille believes that the reality storytelling movement is "part of a -- backlash is the wrong word, but a hunger for something simpler and more stripped down" (Linett, 2013, p. 15). Reality storytelling brings back something from an earlier time, something Lille thinks people have missed.

Lille compares reality storytelling with radio; specifically, *This American Life*. The distinctions made by Lille, however, also serve to distinguish reality storytelling from festival storytelling. He says that the shows are "intimate."

The conceit of this whole art form is that you're sitting in a bar telling your friends a story. And that's actually not far from that. We intentionally hold the tapings in spaces that are small, where the performers are very close to the audience and there's no separation -- the audience goes right up to the stage. There are no visuals, no stage design. So it's sort of the same thing that radio does. There's nothing to focus on other than the person talking. I think we're trying to hit the same place, emotionally. (Linett, 2013, p. 15).

Reality storytelling is intentionally intimate: small audiences in a bar seated right up to the stage. Festival storytelling audiences can be enormous, especially at Jonesborough, and the stage is decidedly separate from the audience.

Adult language and themes are repeatedly encountered as accepted within reality storytelling, but not required. Lille has an interesting perspective on this as well. Linett comments: "That reminds me how many four-letter words I've heard from your storytellers, which is par for the course in storytelling but less so in science communication. Is that part of how science can be pitched to grownups?" (2013, p. 19). Lille responds:

Yes, we very intentionally make the space safe for adults. People talk about making a place safe for kids, but it also works the other way. We hold our shows in bars that are 21-plus, and there's an "explicit" label on the podcast on iTunes. So we have no problems with our storytellers saying whatever they want. Some of the stories end up being very explicitly about sex, though that doesn't happen very often. The goal is to make this a place where we engage with science in this very adult, convivial way, and ironically the way to do that is to swear a lot sometimes. Nobody's sitting there worried about whether a kid will hear it. So they can dive into these really emotionally intense stories that come out. (Linett, 2013, p. 19)

This is quite different from the attitudes of those who objected to Spalding Gray and the KSU teller's performances on festival stages. They felt that the use of obscene language made the space unfriendly, but Lille says the freedom to use that kind of language makes the reality storytelling stage a "safe space." The question might be "safe for whom?" Reality storytelling seems to have more of an aim towards making the teller feel safe to tell any story, than assure the audience that they will always be safe as listeners.

Harvey (2008), Sobol (1999), and Lille (Linett, 2013) illustrate how reality storytelling goes beyond truth to authenticity. It is both uncomfortable and intimate.

My friend, Shannon McNeal, whom I interviewed in 2015, describes the factual flexibility of reality storytelling. While performing at Carapace, Shannon got the signal that she was almost out of time.

So I'm like
Okay I'm stringing everybody along.
How I'm gonna wrap this up?
And like
a year after all this happened
and my parents knew I was gay after all this

I was interviewed by 11Alive News
and across the bottom it said
Shannon McNeal, Lesbian.
And that's a great line.
It's true.
But it didn't happen in this order.
So I throw in that
there on the news there I am:
Shannon McNeal, Lesbian. (S. McNeal, personal communication, March 12, 2015).

Shannon took an event that historically happened outside the context of the story she was telling and added it to her story because it created an effective and humorous conclusion. Not many members of the reality storytelling community so freely divulge which parts of their stories break with historical accuracy and I am grateful to Shannon for this honest glimpse into her creative process.

This is what I began my study knowing about reality storytelling, and about Carapace.

Information

The field of Information and Library Science may seem like a strange home for research on reality storytelling. However, I would argue that precisely because there is so little LIS research on oral and embodied information, this study is needed in this field.

Conduit metaphor.

For one thing, our conceptualization of information tends to be based on the conduit metaphor. The conduit metaphor suggests that:

- (1) language functions like a conduit, transferring thoughts bodily from one person to another;
- (2) in writing and speaking, people insert their thoughts or feelings in the words;
- (3) words accomplish the transfer by containing the thoughts or feelings and conveying them to others; and
- (4) in listening or reading, people extract the thoughts and feelings once again from the words. (Reddy, 1979, p. 290)

Reddy (1979) points out a major flaw of this metaphor. It makes communication seem so easy and natural that "what requires explanation is failure to communicate" (p. 295).

Information theory, built off this metaphor, somewhat addresses the issue of problems in communication with “noise” as seen below.

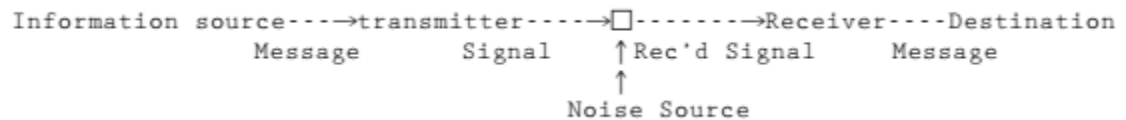


Figure 1. Information Theory (Day, 2000, p. 806)

There may be some external force that distracts from or distorts the signal before it gets to the receiver.

There are, however, other criticisms of information theory and the conduit metaphor. Reddy (1979) points out that the metaphor also implies that “thoughts and feelings are ejected by speaking or writing into an external ‘idea space’” and that “thoughts and feelings are reified in this external space, so that they exist independent of any need for living human beings to think or feel them” (p. 292). Although Reddy says that these ideas might be spoken, this model hardly seems to resemble oral communication.

For similar reasons, Ong (2008) declines to use the term “media” in a work that digs into the medium of orality (p. 172).

The reason is that the term can give a false impression of the nature of verbal communication, and of other human communication as well. Thinking of a ‘medium’ of communication or of ‘media’ of communication suggests that communication is a pipeline transfer of units of material called ‘information’ from one place to another. My mind is a box. I take a unit of ‘information’ out of it, encode the unit (that is, fit it to the size and shape of the pipe it will go through), and put it into one end of the pipe (the medium, something in the middle between two other things). From one end of the pipe the ‘information’ proceeds to the other end, where someone decodes it (restores its proper size and shape) and puts it in his or her own boxlike container called a mind. This model obviously has something to do with human communication, but, on close inspection, very little, and it distorts the act of communication beyond recognition. (p 172).

Ong (2008) says that the most basic difference between verbal communication and other forms of communication is that verbal communication “demands anticipated feedback in

order to take place at all" (p. 173). He points out that "In the medium model, the message is moved from sender-position to receiver-position. In real human communication, the sender has to be not only in the sender position but also in the receiver position before he or she can send anything" (p. 173).

The willingness to accept the conduit metaphor or the media model shows a chirographic bias. Ong (2008) says that "chirographic cultures regard speech as more specifically informational than do oral cultures, where speech is more performance-oriented, more a way of doing something to someone" (pp. 173-174). He continues, "the written text appears *prima facie* to be a one-way informational street, for no real recipient (reader, hearer) is present when the texts come into being" (p. 174).

Disembodied information.

The separation of words from humans is also problematic. Primary oral cultures can not conceive of disembodied words because sound "comes from inside living organisms" (Ong, 2008, p. 32). Humorously, Ong points out:

Sound cannot be sounding without the use of power. A hunter can see a buffalo, smell, taste, and touch a buffalo when the buffalo is completely inert, even dead, but if he hears a buffalo, he had better watch out: something is going on. (p. 32)

Sound is intricately tied to life, and in an oral culture, that means words are, too.

This conceptualization information as a disembodied object seems to be due to "the origins of information studies in the provision of information through libraries and digital repositories" (Cox, et al., 2017, p. 1). Day (2010) also sees this coming from "the popular understanding of intellectual freedom in library practice that holds that the researching subject should have unfettered access to 'information.' The term 'information' is understood here as something akin to naturally occurring empirical objects" (p. 5). As a result, "the evolution of research in the specialty of information behaviour has led to a focus on information in written

texts, an emphasis on cognition and a relative neglect of the role of the body” (Cox, et al., 2017, p. 2). Libraries are interested in information objects, and research that comes out of library science favors this type of information. It is unfortunate that research on information has not been more influenced by the oral interactions that take place in libraries, such as reference interviews and story time programs. The very persistence of the library as a physical space implies there is value in the ability of patrons to bodily inhabit that space. The library could take a role in rectifying this bias toward disembodied information.

Bauman (1977) describes a similar bias he has come up against in studies of verbal art. He found the various approaches to understanding verbal art to all be “text-centered” (p. 8). Bauman says that this text-centeredness places “severe constraints on the development of a meaningful framework for the understanding of verbal art as performance, as a species of situated human communication, a way of speaking” (p. 8). A focus on text makes it difficult to discuss performance or oral communication in a live context.

Embodied information practices.

Some research has been conducted on the role of the body in information practices. Lloyd (2010) says that “our bodies, the information they possess, produce and disseminate are central for understanding the information experience we have created when we engage with learning and knowledge acquisition through the collective and situated practices that shape our specific information landscapes” (paragraph 5). Lloyd’s research, as described in Olsson & Lloyd (2017a) “has led her to conclude that embodied information practices are rich sites of knowledge in that they:

- are always situated (in situ)
- are expressed corporeally, and central to actors understanding the social and epistemic modalities of the landscape;
- act as sites for know-how knowledge, which cannot be effectively expressed in written form (e.g. learning how to recognise an artefact; learning how to write; learning how read a fire)

- are local/nuanced, drawing from expertise in situ and may be contingent and only available at the 'moment of practice'." (paragraph 8)

Olsson's work is particularly relevant to the study of information in the context of live performances.

For actors in particular embodiment is an essentially literal process: they need to physically become their character (at least for a few hours' traffic upon the stage). Embodiment was important not only for their sensemaking as individuals, but also in allowing them to act as an embodied signifier for their audience (Olsson & Lloyd, 2017a, paragraph 25).

Actors are highly conscious of how they use their bodies to convey information.

There has also been some research on oral information. When seeking information to help them create a production, Olsson's (2010) theater participants were most greatly influenced by "social interactions, including informal conversations with their colleagues or mentors and interactions at rehearsals" (p. 275). They placed highest value on oral information. It is possible Olsson's participants had an oral bias due to their profession. However, "information behavior researchers continuously find that people prefer to talk to other people when seeking and using information" (Turner, 2010, p. 371). So, their oral preference could also be a general human trait.

Turner (2010) found that orality is "persistent" (p. 371), "an enjoyable social activity" (p. 372), and "the richest of all media" (p. 373). "When designing future studies that focus on orally-based information," (p. 380) she suggests considering the ways in which the use of orality to convey information:

- (1) is flexible in relation to how other modes are used;
- (2) is not easily replaced;
- (3) can adapt in the event that the nature of information it is used to access changes; and
- (4) is influenced by context and time. (Turner, 2010, p. 380)

Sense-making.

There is a bit of research on sense-making through performance. Olsson (2010) found that those who work in Shakespearean theater demonstrate “ongoing awareness that they need to make sense of Shakespeare’s texts, not just for themselves but for their audience” (p. 278). Viewers make sense of the text of the play through the performance, and this sense-making must be facilitated by those putting on the show.

Georges’s (1969) model of what happens at a storytelling event visually shows the storyteller and audience member merging as they ultimately make sense of the story together (pp. 320-321). The teller and listener begin as two separate entities. As the listener receives the message from the storyteller and the storyteller receives feedback from the listener they begin to merge. Together they shape the message.





Figure 2. Georges's Model (Georges, 1969, pp. 320-321)

Audience members melt into the crowd and the listeners' identities merge with the storyteller's until there are no individual personalities, but only the message.

Day (2000) calls for information studies to be "rethought outside the [current] paradigm" (p. 811). Oral and performance interactions are outside the current paradigm. If we are to understand information practices across the broad range of possible ways that human beings communicate this is an area that deserves attention.

Context: Place, Space, and Media

Examining embodied information practices means paying attention not only to bodies, but also to the stuff all around the bodies. Performance is a "situated behavior, situated within

and rendered meaningful with reference to relevant contexts" (Bauman, 1977, p. 27). Part of the performance setting includes "culturally defined places where performance occurs" (p. 27). People know that performances occur in certain locations.

Furthermore, the performance space gives clues as to what kind of performances happen there. "[T]he place of performance itself provides a primary framework: spectators who are intrigued by a certain kind of performance go to places where it is practiced and thereby enter into a tacit contract with the performers not to be outraged by what happens" (McAuley, 1999, p. 41). For example, holding reality storytelling events in a bar helps communicate to the audience that they ought to expect adult stories.

The bar.

Georges (1969) says that the storyteller and story listener have rights and duties. Both parties act "in accordance with socially prescribed rules with which [they] and the other participants in the storytelling event are familiar" (p. 118). It is possible that newcomers to any event may not be fully aware of the socially prescribed rules. Although most people who come to a bar to hear storytelling will not be outraged by the content of a reality storytelling show, it is possible that a few haven't read the fine print of the "tacit contract" they entered into by showing up to the event.

Historically, festival audiences have expected the storytellers to keep them safe, but bars, historically, have been the venue for edgier stuff.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, with the invention of the phonograph, a black market immediately sprung up for "blue discs" (Smith, 2008, p. 61). The material on these discs ranged from suggestive jokes to audio the listener was meant to believe represented an actual sexual interaction. These discs were often listened to, communally, in bars. Smith (2008) explains that

the phonograph industry was particularly hard hit by the Depression, and record sales plummeted. Fewer people could afford records for home use, so public listening became more widespread. This public listening was centered on the jukebox. (p. 58)

Smith (2008) continues: "Jukeboxes at the time were often found in bars and taverns" (p. 58). The local bar was the place to go to listen to records. Among those records, were blue discs. In fact, "blue discs made between the 1920s and 1950s seem to have been made largely for a tavern jukebox audience" (p. 58). The records might have a song on one side and the blue material on the other "so as to more easily hide the obscene material on jukeboxes" (p. 58). Furthermore, advertising for one blue disc manufacturer, Larry Vincent's risqué Pearl Records, carried the slogan "Rockin' the boxes" (p. 58). The blue discs were created with a bar audience in mind.

We can speculate that the tradition of listening to blue discs at the tavern was built on an older one of drinking buddies sharing suggestive jokes face to face and exaggerated stories of sexual prowess. Holding a storytelling event in a bar sends a strong message about the content audience members should expect. Lille (Linett, 2013) states that the bar also helps create an intimate setting and the illusion that the listeners are simply chatting with friends.

Media.

It is worth considering the media used during a storytelling performance. Turner (1988) says:

The 'same' message in different media is really a set of subtly variant messages, each medium contributing its own generic message to the message conveyed through it. The result is something like a hall of mirrors--magic mirrors, each interpreting as well as reflecting the images beamed to it, and flashed from one to the others. (pp. 23-24)

This is not as emphatic as McLuhan's (1988) aphorism "the medium is the message" (p. 17), but resonates with McLuhan's (& Fiore, 2001) restatement that "the medium is the message" (p. 26). McLuhan (& Fiore, 2001) was preoccupied with the effects of media on individuals and society, saying "All media work us over completely" (p. 26).

McLuhan discusses media being “hot” or “cold,” referring to the degree to which a medium fills up one or more senses. McLuhan (2003) says:

A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in ‘high definition.’ ‘High definition is the state of being well filled with data. A photograph is, visually, ‘high definition.’ A cartoon is ‘low definition,’ simply because very little visual information is provided. Telephone is a cool medium, or one of low definition, because the ear is given a meager amount of information. And speech is a cool medium of low definition, because so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener. On the other hand, hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience. (p. 39)

In *The Laws of Media*, the McLuhans (1988) state that an overheated medium “reverses.” This “involves dual action simultaneously, as figure and ground reverse position and take on a complementary configuration. It is the peak of form, as it were, by overload” (p. 228).

Turning figure into ground is a reference to Gestalt psychology. Figure-ground reversal is the shifting of perception “of which parts of the image represent the figure and which represent the (back)ground” (Colman, 2015, p. 280). The “reversible goblet” created by the Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin illustrates how figure and ground can be reversed. In this instance the image can be seen as either a goblet or two faces depending on which color is perceived as figure and which as ground.



Figure 3. “Reversible goblet” (Colman, 2015, pp. 658-659)

The microphone, stage, and lights are some of the media that may be present at reality storytelling events.

Sobol (1999) describes the microphone as “a rod of power” (p. 100). It is like a magic speaking stick, not only giving the performer permission to take an extended turn at speaking, but making her louder than everyone else in the room. It enhances the “private’ individual voice” while doing away with “private space” (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988, p. 143). The speaker, presumably, sacrifices privacy to amplify her voice. Overheated, the microphone creates “closed, collective space” (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988, p. 143). The microphone is meant to amplify a voice, making it more heard than others. Overamplification leads to the voice not just being more heard, but the only sound heard. The McLuhans (1988) suggest this creates a “wrap-around sound-bubble” (p. 143). An overheated microphone, rather than reaching an ever larger audience, marks boundaries around an in-group of listeners. They are cut off from the world outside the bubble because they can not hear it.

Smith (2008) offers an example of how the use of a microphone alters performance. “The microphone’s ability to capture subtleties of vocal timbre and inflection faithfully opened up the possibility of new forms of performance marked by a quiet intensity and subtle shadings of inflection, suggestive of intimacy and emotional density” (Smith, 2008, p. 8). A mic-ed storyteller can do things with her voice that a storyteller without a microphone can not. Rather than worrying overly much about being loud and clear, the mic-ed performer can focus on really using her voice to perform the story.

An important medium, on which the McLuhans (1988) are silent, is the stage. McAuley (1999) sees theater space as divided: “it is a place of employment for some, a place of entertainment and cultural enrichment for others. The two groups have their designated areas within the space that is, in traditional theatres, quite rigidly demarcated” (p. 25). The stage is one indicator of this division. Those on the stage are working. Those off the stage are being entertained.

The association with theater also causes audience members to expect what occurs on stage to be a performance. "The behavior of actors onstage is marked; spectators know that it is to be interpreted differently from apparently identical behaviors occurring in other places" (McAuley, 1999, p. 39). It may seem obvious that storytelling is a performance, but certain types of storytelling can have a non-performative feel. The fact that a stage signifies "performance" does create a distance between teller and listeners.

Building on the McLuhans' (1988) understanding of media as extensions of the human body, we can also extrapolate that the stage gives the storyteller added height and visibility. Perhaps it even sets the storyteller physically and metaphorically "above" the audience, as if he or she is more important than they are. Certainly, the storyteller is the most visible and audible person in the room and is given an extended turn to speak. The McLuhans' (1988) Laws of Media state, however, that each medium also contains the seeds of its own reversal. Overheated, then, (perhaps too high, or with too much marked separation between performer and audience) the stage turns the performer from a king on a throne, to the jester; the least important person in the room, performing in service to a royal audience.

Lighting in performance is often used to draw the eye to the performer. The McLuhans' (1988) say that electric light enhances "space as visual figure" and reverses into "blinding" (p. 194). Candles and oil lamps create pools of light. The light must be moved over the thing that needs to be seen. Electric lights, as typically used in a home or public building, flood the entire room with light. The whole space can be seen, not just the objects within a small pool of light. In this way "space" becomes more "figure" - brought into greater focus.

The potentially blinding nature of light is one most people have experienced. When light is shone into the eyes instead of on objects that a person wishes to see, the person becomes unable to see anything. Their pupils contract. They instinctively close their eyes. They do not

see. Overexposure to light (like staring at the sun) can even cause long term damage to the eyes resulting in a more permanent loss of vision.

Lighting goes along with the stage and microphone to create more or less of a feel of connection between storyteller and audience. Equal lighting illuminates the entire room and everyone in it. A spotlight highlights the storyteller, raising his or her visibility for the audience. Spotlights also retrieve the pool of light cast by a candle or lamp. The light is only on the object of interest. Stage lighting that lights up the entire stage (while the house lights stay low), is more like a lit room. However, the difference in the lighting suggests that the stage is a different room from the rest of the theater. Spotlights and bright full-stage lights also blind the storyteller so that the audience is not visible to him or her. And, the "heat" may become literal at this point, as some stage lights emanate enough heat to make the performer sweat. This also furthers the idea that an overheated stage flips the storyteller into a subservient role, in this case sacrificing his or her own vision and comfort in order to be more visible to the audience.

The spoken word and collective unconscious.

An important, but easily overlooked, medium in use at Carapace is the spoken word. Face to face oral communication is sometimes referred to as "unmediated," however, this is debatable. McLuhan (2003) treats language as a technology: "Each mother tongue teaches its users a way of seeing and feeling the world and of acting in the world, that is quite unique" (p. 114). This may make us wonder, what truly unmediated communication would look like.

McLuhan (2003), drawing on the philosophy of Henri Bergson (2000), suggests that a collective unconscious preceded language. Bergson (2000) says that we have a "language whose signs - which cannot be infinite in number - are extensible to an infinity of things" (p. 153). Mithen (2006) agrees that language, created of separate units which can be combined

and recombined allows for the creation of “an infinite array of new utterances” and that “compositionality” is “the feature that makes language so much more powerful than any other communication system” (p. 253). This flexibility of language allows humans to talk about anything and it is what has separated mankind from the collective unconscious (McLuhan, 2003, p. 113).

Bergson (2000) describes how language leads to higher thinking: “Now, this mobility of words, that makes them able to pass from one thing to another, has enabled them to be extended from things to ideas” (p. 153). Bergson (2000) credits language with the furthering of human intelligence: “Without language, intelligence would probably have remained riveted to the material objects which it was interested in considering. It would have lived in a state of somnambulism, outside itself, hypnotized on its own work” (p. 153). Again, Mithen’s (2006) hypothesis on the origins of language agrees. He imagines that “the first words may initially have been of primary significance to the speaker” and that these words were used “to facilitate their own thought and planning, rather than as a means of communication” (p. 259). Words may have influenced thought even before they were used to communicate.

McLuhan (2003) compares the mobility of mind that language enables with the physical mobility offered by the wheel:

Language does for intelligence what the wheel does for the feet and the body. It enables them to move from thing to thing with greater ease and speed and ever less involvement. Language extends and amplifies man but it also divides his faculties. His collective consciousness or intuitive awareness is diminished by this technical extension of consciousness that is speech. (p. 113)

Instead of being primarily engaged in his surroundings (as Bergson (2000) describes prelingual existence) man becomes more inward-looking and more self-aware.

McLuhan (2003) explains that in extending our bodies and minds through technology we also become numb to actual parts of ourselves. “Autoamputation” occurs (McLuhan, 2003, p.

63). Thus, the rise of the self-awareness through language numbs us to what McLuhan calls the collective unconscious.

There very probably have been a couple of other layers of communication between the collective unconscious and today's prose speech. The Greek historian Strabo (1903) argues that all oratorical forms are derived from poetry:

I answer, that flowery prose is nothing but an imitation of poetry. Ornate poetry was the first to make its appearance, and was well received. Afterwards it was closely imitated by writers in the time of Cadmus, Pherecydes, and Hecataeus. The metre was the only thing dispensed with, every other poetic grace being carefully preserved. As time advanced, one after another of its beauties was discarded, till at last it came down from its glory into our common prose. (Book 1, Chapter 2, Section 6)

There is evidence that language has evolved in a way not unlike what Strabo has suggested. In studying oral cultures (cultures in which orality is the only or primary means of communication) Ong (2008) has observed many characteristics of orality. Because there are no external places for storing knowledge (e.g. scrolls, books, computers) oral people must "[t]hink memorable thoughts" (Ong, 2008, p. 34). His description of "memorable thought" sounds a lot like poetry: "heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulaic expressions" (Ong, 2008, p. 34). The thing that moved oral communication away from poetic expression to the (mostly) prose speech that is familiar to us today, was writing.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Mithen (2006) suggests that before poetry came music. Drawing evidence from studies of modern day primates, Mithen (2006) proposes that our hominid ancestors had a communication system that was "holistic, manipulative, multi-modal, and musical" (p. 121).

By "holistic" Mithen (2006) means that the calls of primates "lack consistent and arbitrary meanings, and are not composed into utterances by a grammar that provides an additional level of meaning" like our language (p. 120). This holistic quality is exemplified by

vervet monkeys who have different alarm calls for danger above (e.g. an eagle) and danger below (e.g. a snake), but do not use distinct words and grammar to say "beware of the snake" (Mithen, 2006, p. 109). This is very different from the "mobility" of our words as described by Bergson (2000, p. 153). The vervet alarm call for danger below can not be broken up into words or syllables that can be rearranged to mean something else. No part of the call has a separate meaning that could be used in another situation.

Mithen's (2006) hominid communications are "manipulative" in that they are meant to obtain a specific reaction from another individual, not to simply tell them about the world (p. 120). He uses the term "multi-modal" to describe the use of "gesture as well as vocalization" (Mithen, 2006, p. 120). Finally, Mithen describes this communication as musical as it makes "substantial use of rhythm and melody, and involve[s] synchronization and turn-taking" (Mithen, 2006, p. 121). Mithen (2006) goes on to argue that the communications of our ancestors were very musical before language, as we know it, developed.

Did poetry or music remove us from the collective unconscious, as McLuhan (2003) says language did? Actually, Mithen (2006) points out that when "people join together for a group activity - a family meal, a meeting with work colleagues, a football team assembling for a match - they typically arrive from quite different immediate experiences" (p. 214). The group members come together different. But music can make them more alike. "Those who make music together will mould their own minds and bodies into a shared emotional state, and with that will come a loss of self-identity and a concomitant increase in the ability to cooperate with others" (Mithen, 2006, p. 215). By this description music brings us closer to a collective consciousness. This also seems very like Georges's (1969) model of what happens at a storytelling event, depicted in the above section on Sense-making.

When Mithen (2006) describes the main limitation of primate communication we get an alternate view of what life was like before language. He says that primates lack theory of mind, "the ability to imagine that the beliefs, desires, intentions and emotional states of another individual might be different from one's own" (Mithen, 2006, p. 128). Without theory of mind, there is no reason for the more complex communication language provides. "If one assumes that another individual has the same knowledge and intentions as one's own, there is no need to communicate that knowledge or to manipulate their behavior" (Mithen, 2006, p. 117). This vision of the pre-language state of being suggests something a little different from collective unconscious. Rather each individual imagined every other individual shared his thoughts or feelings, but only because he could not imagine that it was possible to have different thoughts or feelings.

Thought without theory of mind sounds very like Bergson's (2000) assertion that intelligence without communication remains "riveted to the material objects which it was interested in considering" (p. 153). There is no thought outside of my thought. There are no objects outside of these objects.

McLuhan (2003), making reference to Bergson (2000), says that "even consciousness is an extension of man that dims the bliss of union in the collective unconscious. Speech acts to separate man from man, and mankind from the cosmic unconscious" (p. 113). However, Bergson (2000) sees intuition, an unconscious trait, and intelligence, a conscious trait, to be inextricably intertwined. Intuition establishes a "sympathetic communication" between "us and the rest of the living" (Bergson, 2000, p. 172). He calls this an "expansion of consciousness" which "introduces us into life's own domain" (Bergson, 2000, p. 172). And although intuition "transcends intelligence, it is from intelligence that has come the push that has made it rise to

the point it has reached" (Bergson, 2000, p. 172). Intuition connects us to other living things, but in doing so expands our consciousness.

Along with the stage, microphone, and lights, the spoken word is a medium used at Carapace. There seems to be some relationship between the spoken word and a theorized collective unconscious. Perhaps, modern forms of face to face orality, such as reality storytelling, help bring us a little closer this universal consciousness.

Performances

Finally, what happens at Carapace is more or less a performance. Jackson (2003) says she finds performance "the most useful place from which to speculate upon the nature of identity, space, temporality, and social interaction" (p. V).

Types of performance.

Schechner (2002) identifies eight kinds of performance:

- 1 in everyday life -- cooking, socializing, "just living"
- 2 in the arts
- 3 in sports and other popular entertainments
- 4 in business
- 5 in technology
- 6 in sex
- 7 in ritual -- sacred and secular
- 8 in play. (p. 25)

Goffman (1986) describes the first type, social performance as: "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (p. 15). This type of performance has to do with behaving appropriately in a social situation.

Bauman (1977) sees performances as slightly different from other social interactions:

Fundamentally, performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence. This competence rests on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways. (p. 11)

This sounds very like social performance, but Bauman goes on to differentiate verbal art as different from the "simple talk" or "straight speech" of specific cultural groups. He aligns performative speech with ceremony or invocation (pp. 12-13). Performance involves then, behaving like a performer.

What Bauman (1977) has described could be called cultural performances. Conquergood (2016) calls cultural performances: "ritual, ceremony, celebration, festival, parade, pageant, feast, and so forth" (p. 94). He points out that even in "'modern' communities" cultural performances "function as a special form of public address" (Conquergood, 2016, p. 94). These are moments set somewhat apart from other regular social interactions. A few of Schechner's (2002) eight types of performance could be cultural performances: ritual, play, sports, possibly others.

I wish to set artistic or aesthetic performance apart from cultural performance. Schechner (2002) acknowledges that his eight types of performance are "sometimes separate, sometimes overlapping" (p. 25). So, this distinction between cultural performance and aesthetic performance is not neat or absolute. Some do not make this distinction at all (Turner, 1988, p. 81). However, in discussing performance as a spectrum, Schechner (2002) says: "Performing on stage, performing in special social situations (public ceremonies, for example), and performing in everyday life are a continuum" (p. 143). I take his "performing onstage" (p. 143) to correspond primarily with his second type of performance, "in the arts" (p. 25), and my understanding of aesthetic performance. Schechner's "performing in special social situations" like "public ceremonies" (p. 143) I am corresponding with cultural performance. Finally, the everyday life performance is performance of self in ordinary social situations. At the same time that Schechner (2002) is placing these performances on a continuum he is naming them separately.

Stage.

Although I have aligned Schechner's "performing onstage" (p. 143) with aesthetic performance, I believe that a stage may be present in both aesthetic *and* cultural performances. My "stage" does not have to be a lit, mic-ed, elevated theatrical stage. It is simply a space set aside for the performer (or performers). The stage separates the performer and audience.

Bergner (2013) describes the circle as what may have been the first stage:

This began as a space of ritual in early cultural developments. It represents the earliest form of the group dynamic, a place for storytelling and sharing. We hear of cave paintings that depict a central figure delivering a ritualistic reenactment of a hunt to a circle of fellow tribesmen. We have evidence of a tribal shaman in the center of a circle, perhaps by a fire, conducting a ritualistic dance for purposes of summoning the spiritual realm. These romantic images, seen with glowing color in television documentaries, help assert that the circle is a ritual space and one of the earliest inventions of sacred space. (p. 13)

We can imagine a circle naturally forming when a social interaction morphs into a cultural performance. An individual is given an extended turn to speak as they begin telling a story. Others gather around in a circle to listen. At parties that include dancing, a circle is sometimes formed inside which one person or a small number of people show off their dance moves. The circle is a simple stage - space left around the performer(s).

Bergner (2013) describes the square as a form of space also related to the stage, but it is much more typical of theater stages. The proscenium is "a stage that is distinguished by the rectangular portal that frames the playing area" (p. 14). The performance takes place "in a neat box" (p. 14). The theater stage is often framed by a square or rectangle, which the audience looks through like a window. Taking the shape into the third dimension, the stage space itself is a large box.

Turner's (1988) model of "the evolution of cultural models of performance" features "separation" (e.g. "in special place") as an important aspect of cultural performances (p. 9). Although the box may be more what usually comes to mind when performance on a stage is

being discussed, I find it useful here to use a more liberal definition of stage. This definition includes the circle, a simple allowance of space, to help distinguish cultural performances from the performance of self in social situations.

Overlapping performances.

These various types of performance also overlap and interact with one another. Schechner (2002) points out that there are “no clear boundaries separating everyday life from family and social roles or social roles from job roles, church ritual from trance, acting onstage from acting offstage, and so on” (pp. 143-146). A blurring of the boundaries and performance within performance is to be expected.

In a staged storytelling performance “the storyteller and the story listener have a social identity imposed by the storytelling event” (in addition to other social identities that will already exist) (Georges, 1969, p. 318). Both parties have “duties” and “rights” (p. 318). He says:

The storyteller’s duties are to formulate, encode, and transmit a message in accordance with socially prescribed rules with which he and the other participants in the storytelling event are familiar; the storyteller’s rights are that the story listener receive, decode, and respond to the message in accordance with socially prescribed rules with which he and the other participants in the storytelling event are familiar. (p. 318)

The story listener’s rights and duties mirror those of the storyteller:

The story listener’s rights are that the storyteller formulate, encode, and transmit a message in accordance with socially prescribed rules with which he and the other participants in the storytelling event are familiar; the story listener’s duties are to receive, decode, and respond to that message in accordance with socially prescribed rules with which he and the other participants in the storytelling event are familiar. (p. 318)

Georges (1969) takes for granted that the storyteller and listener know how to play their parts due to “socially prescribed rules with which [they] are familiar” (p. 318); however, they may not be aware of all the social rules when they first encounter storytelling in general, or one event in particular. Goffman (1959) says that when an individual moves into a “new position in society and obtains a new part to perform, he is not likely to be told in full detail how to

conduct himself, nor will the facts of his new situation press sufficiently on him from the start to determine his conduct without his further giving thought to it" (p. 72). Over time the individual comes to understand the rules. "In short, we all act better when we know how" (Goffman, 1959, p. 74).

There are multiple levels of performance going on in Georges' (1969) description of a storytelling interaction. The storyteller is putting on a staged performance. However, the storyteller and the audience members are also engaged in social performances. The storyteller is performing, socially, in the role of performer, and the audience members are expected to perform in a certain way as listeners. This will be true of all cultural and artistic performances. They are also social situations, and there is a socially proscribed way to behave.

Gettysburg ghost tour guides mix staged performance and unstaged social interaction to be more persuasive. Thompson (2010) has found that people view staged performance as insincere. Ghost tour guides "must assume a performance persona in order to command the authority to perform, but the persona betrays the guide's ability to persuade the audience of anything, let alone the existence of ghosts" (p. 86). Tourists do not take the guides seriously when they say they believe in ghosts if the whole thing is just an act. Thompson says that guides can be seen as more personally sincere by "rendering their performance personae porous" (p. 86). There are times when the guides are not performing, such as before the tour while tourists are arriving, and as they walk between sites on the tour. By allowing the tourists to see their "real" selves between performances, the guides are taken to be more personally sincere.

Reality storytelling shows also allow audience members to mingle with performers when they are not performing, just as Thomson's (2010) ghost tour guides were accessible between performances at various stops on the tour. Storytellers may perform on stage, but they truly are

available for social interaction off stage, which likely impacts the overall reality storytelling show experience for performers and audience members.

Lillie says of reality storytelling:

The conceit of this whole art form is that you're sitting in a bar telling your friends a story. And that's actually not far from that. We intentionally hold the tapings in spaces that are small, where the performers are very close to the audience and there's no separation -- the audience goes right up to the stage" (Linett, 2013, p. 15).

He is describing a staged aesthetic performance that is meant to seem like a social interaction or cultural performance.

According to The Moth website, the founder, George Dawes Green, "wanted to recreate, in New York, the feeling of sultry summer evenings in his native Georgia, where he and his friends would gather on his friend Wanda's porch to share spellbinding tales" (The Moth, 2018). Green is also trying to evoke cultural performance on an aesthetic stage. Interestingly, his inspiration is front porch storytelling, which is a little different from friends telling each other stories in a bar. There is a conscious effort on the part of reality storytelling show producers to imitate cultural or social performance.

Backstage behavior and flooding out.

Reality entertainment likely has roots in *Candid Camera* and *Candid Microphone*, shows in which subjects were secretly recorded. Rather than hope for glimpses of reality, these shows aimed to catch people "in the act of being themselves" (Smith, 2008, p. 172). The use of "ordinary people" continues to be a defining characteristic of reality entertainment. Ordinary people are not *always* used, as Smith (2008) points out with the example of MTV's *Punk'd*, which mostly targets celebrities (pp. 197-198). Reality storytelling gives opportunities to ordinary people through open mic shows and story slams in which names are randomly drawn and entrance to the event is often free or inexpensive. Celebrities, such as writers, actors, and comedians are also featured on shows like The Moth, although rarely professional storytellers.

Ordinary people are, presumably, not trained actors and this has implications for how they will perform as part of an aesthetic production.

Alan Funt, creator of *Candid Microphone* realized in the early days, that reality does not always make a good story: "turning secret recording into broadcast entertainment presents some particular challenges, one of which is giving a recorded sequence some semblance of formal shape or narrative closure" (Smith, 2008, p. 176). Although audiences crave reality, the truth needs a little help to be entertaining.

Interestingly, the nudge Funt gave to his "subjects" in the form of a "rile," an irritation, in order to create a story arc, also led to more real behavior. In moments of high emotion, often anger, the subjects would "flood out," breaking from the way they normally behaved in public (Smith, 2008, p. 177). Flooding out has continued to be an important "part of a modern style of performance" (Smith, 2008, p. 51).

Goffman (1986) says, of flooding out, that sometimes an "individual will capsize as an interactant, and in this mode of self-removal fail to assemble himself--at least temporarily--for much of any other kind of organized role" (p. 350). The person breaks from character, the character being how they would normally conduct themselves in a given situation. Goffman's (1986) examples of flooding out behavior include "dissolving into laughter or tears or anger, or running from an event in panic and terror" (p. 350).

Just as staged performances usually have a backstage, Goffman (1959) suggests that social performances also possess a staging area. He says that a "back region or backstage may be defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course" (Goffman, 1959, p. 112). Backstage behaviors are private. They are not part of the social performance.

Reality entertainment like *Candid Camera* and *Candid Microphone* further blends pieces of the performance spectrum by including aspects of the performers' personal lives that do not usually make an appearance in their social performances. Private information becomes part of a staged performance. Funt's subjects were riled until they "flooded out" and broke from their social performance. They did not know that they were "on stage" at the time, but the end result was edited and packaged for radio or television.

Casual observation of reality storytelling suggests that the inclusion of the social backstage is an important element of this art form. Storytellers share, in staged performances, things they do not share in unstaged social interactions. Unlike the unknowing subjects of *Candid Camera*, reality storytellers willingly reveal these things.

Reality storytelling is based on real life interactions, social performances. Turner (1988) sees "metaperformance," or "performances about performances about performances" as necessary for "talking about the system in terms not derived from it" (pp. 106-107). Langellier and Peterson (2004) say that "performing narrative on stage uses the tensions and ambiguities of experience to critically participate in, to help inform and shape, the production and reproduction of identities" (p. 221). Personal story performance can express things that can not be expressed in everyday social situations.

It is especially interesting to me that reality storytelling includes elements that are absent from social performances. Earlier forms of reality entertainment may have set a precedent for including the social back stage, but perhaps reality storytellers do so voluntarily.

CHAPTER 3: STUDYING CARAPACE

Researcher as instrument

Personal history.

In August of 2011, I attended my first Carapace show. My friend Shannon McNeal had been attending for several months, and I wanted to try it out. I was very nervous. I knew from Shannon, that seating filled up and I would likely have to share a table with strangers.

I was also nervous about open mic personal storytelling. I grew up attending storytelling festivals and was active in the Georgia guild Southern Order of Storytellers. I began my own storytelling education by telling folktales. First, I learned folktales from other storytellers I had seen at festivals or heard on cassette tape on road trips. Then I started seeking out stories to learn from books, with a special interest in Greek and Roman mythology. I had observed that the foundation of the storytelling movement (upon which festivals and organizations are based) was folktales.

I had heard professional tellers perform personal stories. However, this seemed to me, to be a level they graduated to after mastering the folktale. I wasn't sure I was there yet. Furthermore, the vast majority of professional, and even amateur storytellers I knew were 55 or older. In my twenties, did I even have enough life experience to tell personal stories?

The theme, that first evening I attended Carapace, was "Science." Well, that was no problem. Both of my parents are scientists. For most of my childhood I wanted to be an astronaut. I had things to say about science. I told a story about attending Space Camp.

That first night, I would have been pretty disappointed if my name hadn't been called. I had worked on a story and worked up the nerve to attend. I didn't even appreciate how lucky I

had been until later, when I learned that there are almost always names left in the hat at the end of the evening.

As I continued attending Carapace, the themes helped me remember stories from my life month after month. Even when I put my name in the hat and didn't get called, I had a new story. There was one story I wasn't telling, though. As soon as the events unfolded, (misadventures buying and using a menstrual cup) I knew there was a story there, but I was worried it was too edgy, even for Carapace. That was, until the theme "Taboo." I thought, talking about menstruation is taboo. They've practically asked for it. So I told my story that night. The support and appreciation from the room was palpable. I knew for a fact then, that I could tell any story at Carapace.

I felt loved. I felt validated. I felt, more than ever, that even as a twenty-something, still learning the art of storytelling, I had stories of value. When people take interest in your personal stories, they take interest in you. My entire experience at Carapace made me feel that I mattered.

My history with Carapace could make me biased as a researcher. I love Carapace and somewhat idealize it as the birthplace of my personal storytelling persona. Conducting interviews helped compensate for my rosy view of Carapace by allowing me to see positives and negatives through other people's eyes.

In 2014 I moved away from the Atlanta area to pursue my PhD at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. I stopped regularly attending Carapace. My interest in oral communication, and especially reality storytelling, is largely driven by my time with Carapace. Although it was not my original intent to conduct my dissertation research with this community, it is, perhaps, fitting that that is exactly where I ended up.

Parent.

Now, as a researcher studying this community, I think about who I am, and how I am, in some ways, like others in the Carapace community. I am a white woman in my early thirties with multiple graduate degrees. I am married with two children. When I originally came to Carapace I was working as a school librarian at a private school in Atlanta. I could afford to go to a monthly event at a bar, where I would spend money on food and drink. My husband stayed with our small child, and then children, while I was at Carapace, or we both went and left the kids with family. I was able to participate for these reasons. I am similar to other attendees and participants of Carapace in my level of education, interest, and means.

Being a parent did (and still does) impact my ability to participate in any activity that takes place outside of school/daycare hours. When there was no one else to watch the children, I could not go to Carapace. I relate to other parents at Carapace. For example, I will discuss what I learned about a child who somewhat regularly attends Carapace. The community seems divided in their response to her. However, when her father told me that, initially, bringing her along was the only way he could go to evening events, I empathized with that.

Being a parent has also impacted the stories I've told at Carapace over the years as well as stories I performed during this study. My children have become a huge part of my adult life. Although I would like to think of myself as more than a woman who tells "mommy" stories, in the eyes of other members of the Carapace community, this is part of my identity. One of my participants, Eleanor, told me honestly that she came to expect these stories from me.

I remember when um
I hope this is not offensive
when I thought
every time your name was pulled from the hat
I was going to laugh my head off
and there would be something about breast milk.
All your stories

were at that point
in one way or another
related to what you were doing
in your Mom-life. (E. Brownfield)

The first story I told at Carapace during the course of this study was about my son eating cat poop when he was a year old. This was an event I lived during my time as a Carapace regular but crafted into a story since moving away. It is also exactly the type of story they would expect from me, in spite of my several year absence.

Southern Order of Storytellers.

I was different from most other Carapace attendees, starting out, in that I came to storytelling through Southern Order of Storytellers, the Georgia storytelling guild. I first learned to perform myths and folktales. The result of my folktale background is evident in the comment I got about using my “storyteller” voice. Non-storytellers who come to Carapace may pick up the natural storytelling style that is preferred there easily. I had to unlearn the performance style I had picked up from attending storytelling festivals.

The history, related by Harvey (2008), between Southern Order of Storytellers and the KSU Tellers was not something I was fully privy to until reading her article. However, I did have a sense that SOS had a complicated relationship with non-festival styles of storytelling. My active membership in SOS is one thing that may not have been in my favor when I first came to Carapace, although I cannot confirm that it did negatively impact anyone’s opinion of me.

I was on the board of SOS during the time a greater connection was formed between SOS and Carapace. My friend, Shannon McNeal, who introduced me to Carapace, produced the first “Stories on the Edge of Night.” It was a late night show, opening the SOS annual storytelling festival, and featured reality storytellers from Carapace. It is now much more common to see members of SOS trying out Carapace, or to find Carapace regulars joining SOS.

With the cross-pollination that continues to happen, my dual membership in these communities is less strange now than it was when I first came to Carapace.

Insider.

I began my fieldwork with Carapace with insider status of sorts as a formerly active member of the community. As Michels (2012) points out, being an insider is a tradeoff. "Although the potential for researcher bias is present, being an 'insider' allowed me a significant degree of access to the community and its activities" (p. 19). Like Michels, I found being an insider a mostly positive thing. I re-entered the community on good terms with the organizers and a sense of where to start my interviews.

Even with this status, I approached with caution. Research can feel intrusive. I sought permission from the organizers and then notified the entire community about my project through Facebook, and a live announcement the first night I was there for research. Gaining access seemed so easy, I wondered if I had worried too much. In an interview, though, Shannon Turner, a long time regular, assured me that an outsider would not have had the same experience.

Me: I know that this is very sacred thing.
I was hoping that no one would feel that I was threatening it
and no one has given any indication of that so far.

ST: It'd be different if you were an outsider.

Me: [laughing] Maybe so.

ST: I'm sure of it.

A downside of being an insider was that I began with some ideas and expectations. You can only see what you are looking for, and I had to be careful to look at everything, as if it were my first time attending. I was concerned that people who already knew me may not say everything they could in conversations or interviews because they would know I already know

it. My experience was that my participants were actually very accommodating in interviews and understood that they needed to state the “obvious” even without my asking them. I suspect this is because the Carapace crowd is highly educated and many of them have a sense of how a research interview works. I also mitigated both of these challenges by interviewing newcomers to Carapace. They more recently saw everything for the first time and did not have an existing relationship with me.

Commuting.

My ability to travel to Atlanta during this study was complicated by the fact that I live in Chapel Hill. My husband sometimes travels back to Georgia for work as well. I had some concern that we might both have to be in Georgia at the same time and our children would miss school to travel with us. Partly due to some advance planning on my husband’s part, and partly due to good fortune, this did not happen. The only time we traveled to Georgia as a family in connection with Carapace was in August of 2017, shortly before my children started their school year. We combined the trip with a stop at Clemson (which is on the way) to view the solar eclipse in the path of totality.

Traveling to Atlanta from Chapel Hill made me different from other Carapace participants. It was much more of an event for me. It also created a rhythm to my study, encouraging me to schedule interviews around Carapace. When I went to other related events, I tried to attend on months when they occurred near Carapace. Had I studied a local event, it is very likely my interviews would have been more spread out across the month. It is possible my limited schedule contributed to a couple of potential interviews that fell through.

I am fortunate that I have family still living in the Atlanta area. I stayed with my mother during all my visits except the August trip, when my family and I stayed with my mother-in-law. My mother is also an active participant in Carapace and Southern Order of Storytellers. As an

oral/aurally minded person, our conversations were helpful in processing interviews and experiences. I might not initially notice what had really stood out to me until I said it aloud.

I begin with myself because, as an ethnographer, I am the instrument. Ethnography “privileges the body as a site of knowing” (Conquergood, 2016, p. 82). I have used my body to try and know this community even better, by being there physically and by physically acting like a member of the community. This has been especially appropriate in trying to understand embodied information practices as it “gives access to bodily experience in a way that other methods do not” (Cox et al., 2017, p. 18). I literally had a better “feel” for participants’ bodily experiences.

Site

Carapace takes place at Manuel’s Tavern in Atlanta, Georgia on the fourth Tuesday of the month from 7:30 to 9:00pm. When I was a regular attendee several years ago, Carapace met in a section of the bar reserved for the event. Carapace is free, so no one was barred from entering. However, everyone in the room was there for the show. They were not diners surprised by finding themselves to be a storytelling audience. The room held about 250 people and was often standing-room-only by showtime.

Going in to this study, I knew, through my continuing connections with members of this community, that the show was temporarily displaced while Manuel’s Tavern was renovated. Many attendees did not like the alternative venue and attendance was down while they were there. Carapace moved back to Manuel’s several months ago. From what I could tell, the show was doing well again. However, the inside of the bar has changed, and the show takes place in a different area of Manuel’s than before.

Garcia et al. (2009) advise that “ethnographers should define the field or setting of their research on the basis of their research topic, rather than arbitrarily or prematurely excluding one arena or the other” (p. 54). I have been able to learn a great deal about this community by being physically present at the monthly Carapace shows. To be even more fully engaged, as many in the community are, I also paid attention to postings to the Carapace Facebook page. Garcia et al. (2009) state: “Our review of existing research into the Internet and CMC suggests that ‘virtually all’ ethnographies of contemporary society should include technologically mediated communication, behavior, or artifacts (e.g., Web sites) in their definition of the field or setting for the research” (p. 57). Most communities now have some online interaction worth paying attention to.

Beyond attending Carapace, I visited Manuel’s at other times, to see how else the space is used. To help place Carapace in the greater context of Atlanta’s “live lit” scene, I visited Stories on the Square Gwinnett and Stories on the Square Decatur, Write Club, and the Atlanta Moth. These are all regular monthly events and are run by and/or frequented by people who are attendees of Carapace. I also attended a show produced by Carapace regular, Shannon Turner, Stories on the Edge, which was not a recurring event.

Observation and Participation

I attended Carapace six times in seven months, from July 2017 through January 2018 (there is no show in December). I arrived by 6 or 6:30pm when I did not have an interview scheduled prior to the show, as this is when other attendees begin arriving. When I did have an interview scheduled I arrived as early as 5pm. Arriving early ensured that I got a seat and also allowed me to begin my observations on the relationships between Carapace attendees. The show begins at 7:30pm and lasts until 9:00pm. I stayed through the end of the show and lingered afterwards to observe the closure of the event and how the social interaction in the bar

shifted after the show. Some nights I also conducted an interview after the show and stayed as late as 11:30pm. Interviews immediately after Carapace allowed me the opportunity to talk with participants about the show that had just occurred while the stories and events were still fresh in their minds.

I talked with the Carapace organizers before beginning my study to be certain that I had their blessing. To make information about the study accessible to the rest of the community I put information about the study (Appendix A) on the Carapace Facebook page and talked about my project live at the first show I attended as a researcher. Microphone time is in short supply so my live explanation (Appendix B) was brief. I created business cards with a QR code and link to a page of my professional website dedicated to this study. I placed the cards near the hat at each show so that attendees could grab one and easily look up more information on the study if they wished. I also answered questions about the study in person when asked.

While attending Carapace I made notes about the environment, what stories were told on each night, audience reactions to the stories, and other observations that seemed relevant to my research questions (Appendix C). I audio recorded the shows for later reference but relied most heavily on my field notes. I had conversations with other attendees and took notes on these conversations.

Some months I observed as a listener only. During others I added my name to the hat to tell a story. Names are drawn randomly from the hat as there are usually more volunteers than there is time for stories. Over the course of the study, I had the experience both of being chosen, and of not being chosen. Alexander Craft (2015) points out that by performing, the researcher gives the community she is observing a chance to “watch the watcher watch” (p. 12). By performing, I allowed the Carapace community to observe and critique me. Jackson (2003) says the performer can understand “the intimate mediation of visuality, material culture,

and embodiment” (Jackson, 2003, p. V). Performing did give me insights into the physical and emotional sensations of telling a story at Carapace.

Being a researcher, sometimes made me not the best audience member. Caught up in note-taking I almost missed a personal connection at the January 2018 Carapace. A teller made a comment toward the end of his story that maybe there is an urban legend at his old school about a kid choking on a marble and dying. I was taking notes on his story and it took me a moment to look up and notice that he was looking directly at me because he had been intentionally making a connection to my story, from earlier in the evening, in which I had mentioned urban legends. I didn’t realize, at first, that this teller specifically said that to connect with my story. I also didn’t see him looking at me right away. I could have missed that personal connection of “right now, I’m talking to *you*.” Listening just to listen and looking at the storyteller (as most attendees do) make it easier for those connections to happen.

I dug deeper into the thoughts and experiences of the other attendees through interviews. I obtained verbal consent to conduct and record the interviews. I also inquired verbally whether participants were willing to use their real names or would prefer a pseudonym. All participants consented to using their real names. In order to select participants for interviews I began with a purposive sample. My first interviews were with the creators of Carapace: Randy Osborne, Joyce Mitchell, and Lance Colley. (My interview guide for the creators is in Appendix D.)

Lance moved from Atlanta to Charleston, South Carolina around the same time I moved away in 2014. My family and I traveled to Charleston, so I could conduct his interview in person. All other interviews took place in and around Atlanta.

After interviewing the creators, I interviewed storytellers/attendees from the early years who are still active. I used a slightly different interview guide for attendees than I did for the

Carapace creators (Appendix E). I was able to personally identify these people because of my history with Carapace.

I chose others to interview through snowball sampling (having other interviewees suggest whom I should interview next) and theoretical sampling (targeting participants that might help round out the developing theory). For example, I wished to dig into the idea that everyone is welcome at Carapace by talking to a more conservative-leaning participant (or more than one). I specifically sought out participants that would meet this criterion.

As I spent time in the field, I got to know more people, either directly, or through observation. This allowed me to strategically choose interview participants later in the study, even if I did not know them from my earlier time as a Carapace participant.

I conducted interviews with 19 participants. I approached interviewees myself, either in person or through email or social media, to schedule a time to meet. I scheduled the interviews to take place the day of Carapace, the day before or after, or the day of another Atlanta event. Because I was coming to Atlanta from out of town, this was largely out of convenience. However, I did try to have interviews after Carapace whenever possible so that we could talk about the show that had just occurred.

I used interview guides to focus myself on topics that would help answer my research questions. During interviews I sometimes added in other questions in response to the conversation I was having with my participants. I also edited the guide from month to month as I prepared to conduct interviews around the next Carapace show, based on what I had learned in previous interviews. Randy Osborne, one of the creators, suggested an interview question early in my field work: "If you heard a story at Carapace and later found out, from the teller or someone else, that it was not true, what would your reaction be?" This question yielded a variety of fruitful responses and remained on the guide for the rest of the study.

After talking with Lance Colley, the original host, I also realized that I should ask the current host, Cris Gray, some questions specific to his role. I created a slightly different interview guide for him. (Edited interview guides are in Appendix F.)

My aim in the interviews was not simply to have answers to each question I asked, but to get the participants sharing their experiences or telling their stories. Madison (2012) says that the interview "is a window to individual subjectivity and collective belonging: *I am because we are, and we are because I am*" (p. 28). Some of the richest moments were when participants went down a rabbit hole, emerging 10 or more minutes later asking, "but what was your question?" They were sometimes embarrassed that they had gotten "off topic," but I always assured them I was interested in everything they had to say and made room for them to talk. My interviews were "topical" in that they are very focused on Carapace (Madison, 2012, p. 28). However, as participants talked, the interviews included elements of "oral history" and "personal narrative" as well (p. 28). I took guidance from Madison (2012) in formulating some of my interview questions (Appendices D and E).

I treated the interviews as extended conversations and was fully present as a listener. I was "actively thinking about what [was] being expressed" not just "present in body, but deeply engaged in mind" (Madison, 2012, p. 40).

Madison (2012) says, "If you cannot see or refuse to see the rewards of your status, you will also be blind to the complex inequities and veiled injustices of those whose status is unjustly subordinated" (p. 40). With this in mind, I remained aware of the power dynamic between myself and each participant. I had a certain power as a researcher and as the interviewer, guiding the conversation. I hold a higher level of societal privilege than some of my participants due to my race, class, etc. However, being a woman put me on the other side of that power dynamic while interviewing most white male participants. I interviewed one

participant who currently works as a professor. My status as a doctoral candidate, striving to be what he is, but not quite there, may have impacted the power dynamic between us. In fact, early on in the study, before I asked him for an interview, he had more questions about how and what I was doing than other Carapace attendees. He behaved more curious than condescending. However, answering a professor's questions did make me feel a bit like a student. Madison (2012) sees this as noteworthy as well. If you are interviewing "powerful people whose material and social status is greater than yours, you must still be aware of your status difference as a researcher. You have the power to tell their story and to have the last word on how they will be represented" (p. 40).

I began with the intention to use participants' real names in publications and performances based on this research, with their permission, which they have allowed. "In the shift from ethnographic method (fieldwork) to ethnographic rhetoric (published monograph), named individuals with distinct personalities and complex life histories are inscribed as 'the Bororo' or 'the Tikopia' (Conquergood, 2016, p. 84). Individuality is often lost in the write-up. In this study, which poses so little risk to the participants, it is unnecessary to sacrifice their individuality. Furthermore, many of my participants are performers and very much wish to take credit for their words.

Booth (1987) uses the names of the primary school and many of the individual teachers who participated in his study of collaborative evaluation. In early reports, the school and teachers were assigned pseudonyms. However, they later requested that their actual names be used, even though they were "cautioned" about "the implications of their decision" (p. 66). One teacher explained: "We've done a good job. We should let our work be known, 'warts and all,' otherwise it wouldn't be real" (p. 66). Their wishes were honored, and real names are used in the final report. My participants and I share this sentiment.

Analysis

I transcribed the first two interviews myself and had the remaining interviews professionally transcribed. I did this largely to save time. After I got back transcribed interviews, I edited them while listening to the audio again. In this way I stayed close to the interviews, relistening to them, and interacting with the transcripts. I edited the transcripts poetically, to better represent the way my participants spoke. I used minimal punctuation, and used line breaks to indicate pauses or hesitations in speech. In practice, people rarely speak in complete sentences, and often don't pause where we might expect a comma. Furthermore, poetic transcription is "an alternative to the prose text" that "aims to capture the multidimensional nature of the narrative event" (Madison, 2012, p. 239). Poetic transcription acknowledges "the mutual importance of *how* something is said along with *what* is said in a performance utterance" (p. 239). I have removed some "um"s and "uh"s because I find that the ear easily skips over them (unless specifically listening for them) but the eye gets easily overwhelmed by these filler words on the page. I have not rendered the transcripts with enough visual cues that the reader could attempt to reenact a faithful performance of the participant's actual speech. I have simply tried to soften the rigid structure writing can impose on naturally flowing spoken word and give some impression of how my participants spoke. Quotations from interviews in this document are presented poetically.

I took field notes during my observations, after interviews, after interacting with information on Facebook, and during analysis. I conducted coding on transcripts as well as field notes. I used the constant comparative method, so emerging findings could influence my continued fieldwork. I compared "data with data to find similarities and differences" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 132). Charmaz gives the example of comparing "interview statements and incidents within the same interview" and then comparing "statements and incidents in different

interviews" (p. 132). I also made "sequential comparisons" comparing what happens at Carapace one month with what happens in subsequent months (p. 132).

I ended up conducting 2 to 4 interviews each month, mostly around the time of Carapace. Rather than fully processing an interview (or field notes) before moving on to the next, I conducted initial coding on interviews and notes from one month prior to my next trip to Atlanta. As I sometimes had multiple interviews in the same day, along with a show, conducting analysis in between was not feasible. The natural gaps between bunches of interviews, caused by scheduling around Carapace, provided a useful space for analysis and tasks such as editing the interview guide.

I conducted coding on my transcripts and field notes to "*group together themes and categories that you [I] have accumulated in the field*" (italics in original, Madison, 2012, p. 43). At the same time that I considered which categories made sense, I kept in mind the anticipated products of my research. Madison (2012) suggests that if you plan to create a performance you code with "audience or readers in mind" (p. 44). Coding is "not *exclusively* about grouping similarities--although this is the *priority*" (p. 44).

As suggested by Charmaz (2014) my initial coding focused on action. "Try to see actions in each segment of data" (p. 116). She continues, "Look closely at actions, and to the extent possible, code data *as* actions" (p. 116). Coding for actions "reduces the tendencies to code for types of people" (p. 116). I found this a useful beginning point, especially since actions were easier to see than categories, initially.

Continuing, I took the advice of Madison (2012) to create order among clusters of topics:

- a. You will examine each specific topic within that cluster.
- b. You will then compare and contrast that particular topic within that cluster.
- c. You will continue to examine and note the topics within each cluster.

- d. You will discover overlapping topics, marked distinctions, and topics that should be moved from one cluster to a different cluster. You will also discover that some topics should be eliminated from the study completely.
- e. After the topics within each cluster have been examined, you will then make adjustments for comparisons and contrasts across clusters, thereby creating linkages and themes.
- f. The evolution of your themes has now become apparent. (p. 44)

Similarly, Charmaz (2014) discusses “focused coding”: “concentrating on what your initial codes say and the comparisons you make with and between them” (p. 140). Madison (2012) says that “it is often helpful to create a graphic or picture of your organization framework” after determining the relationships between various topics and clusters (p. 44). I spent a great deal of time staring into space, wrapping my mind around how the things I noted related to each other. I grouped them in one way, and then another, as I continued conducting analysis on new interviews and field notes. I did create graphical representations to help visualize the relationships.



Figure 4. Thinking about agents

Hot stage signals performance, makes teller less safe
 Stage impacts performance
 Hot stage (raised, lights) separates tellers from audience, makes teller (everyone?) less safe
 Hot stage impedes connection
 Physical objects (mic) distracting teller, not connecting with audience
 Ritual (judging) makes teller more or less safe
 Venue makes people feel safe or not
 Time limit makes people feel safe or not
 Venue separates in and out group (or not)
 Context can encourage intimacy
 Context of other audience members makes audience comfortable or not
 Context of audience members makes tellers comfortable or not
 Space making one type of performance feel like another
 Everyone is safer when they understand the context/ritual
 Utility vs signifier of performance
 Keepers of ritual creating context
 Keepers of ritual shaping space
 Event determining how space should be shaped
 Context influences story
 Event benefits (or not) venue
 Physical comfort or discomfort due to space

Figure 5. Colorful coding of relationships

Charmaz (2014) calls memo-writing “the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (p. 162). Through memos I stopped to analyze “ideas about the codes in any - and every - way that occur[ed] to [me] in the moment” (p. 162). I posted my memos in a public blog which was available to the Carapace community. I shared the link on my webpage about the project (which participants could easily access through the business cards I provided). I also posted the link on the Carapace Facebook page. Randy Osborne, one of the creators, drew attention to the blog at several points during the study by sharing specific blog posts on the Facebook page. Michels (2012) found that blogging “research experiences has allowed me to think about and articulate my personal involvement in a context that invites feedback” (p. 19). I found this to be the case for myself as well. Only a couple of

participants actively provided feedback through the blog; however, the fact that it was there kept the community constantly on my mind and prepared me for discussion.

The blog was my main avenue for “member checking” (Charmaz, 2014. P. 210); keeping my participants informed on my thoughts as I went through analysis and allowing them the ability to respond. Participant responses were positive and thoughtful. They helped me focus my analysis through conversation. The responses also reassured me that I was maintaining a good relationship with the community.

Performance

Not only have I learned about the Carapace community by joining in their performance, I have communicated my findings through a performance. On the advice of Conquergood (2016), this performance set out to “bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another” (p. 75). I co-hosted, with Cris Gray, the November 2018 Carapace, with the theme of “The Stories we Tell.” Randy Osborne, one of the organizers, and I co-wrote the prompt, which he published with the Facebook event:

Hey, it’s Randy at Carapace.

You know how Tenacious D’s song “Tribute” is about the “greatest song in the world” but isn’t actually that song? I don’t, but Sarah Beth Nelson does, and she’s helping me write the prompt this month. We’ve cooked up something different. Meta-different.

Come tell a story about a story, or about storytelling. You might build a narrative of five to seven minutes around your first time at Carapace. Or tell about a particularly memorable night, good or bad – truth and consequences, maybe. Feel free to share your experience rolling out a true personal story at any of the other Carapace-like events that have sprung up around Atlanta.

Sarah Beth – you might remember this; maybe she interviewed you – conducted her dissertation research with the Carapace community from July 2017 to January 2018. At our next event, hosted as always by the amazing Cris Gray, Sarah Beth will add brief commentary after each story on how it relates (or doesn’t!) to her findings, which means you get a sort of sneak peek at them.

Her study was done through the method of performance ethnography, observing Carapace in action as well as taking part. Sarah Beth had planned from the start to

create a performance around her research, and share that performance with Carapace as a way of putting the researcher (her) in dialog with the community (you). That's what the November event is about. It'll be fun.

Carapace has existed for almost eight years. "And with each passing day / the stories we say / weave us tighter into our addiction." Lyrics to another song, this one by Vienna Teng. The "addiction" is to her boyfriend. He didn't last.

But Carapace did, thanks to you. C'mon down for the last event of the year, which ought to be a doozy.

See you at Manny's!

As a host, I made brief comments between stories, tying them to observations I've made through my research. I filmed this show so that I may share it in other venues. I also plan to replicate this performance elsewhere by finding volunteers to tell stories of their experiences with other shows that are similar to Carapace. Performances based on ethnographies return to the body. By putting my body on stage and performing with my participants, I hope to "evoke, translate, and hold [myself] accountable to others' bodies" (Hamera, 2016, p. 306).

Challenges of method

A difficulty I had not entirely anticipated was coming across conflicts between community members. This was harder for me personally than it was for me as a researcher. I wanted to remain on good terms with all of my participants (my community). Some participants made snarky comments about others, or they told me about serious problems they had with other community members. I listened thoughtfully to what they had to say without indicating that I agreed with all of it. This experience also challenged one of my biases. I had idealized this community as almost utopian. Seeing the truth about subgroups and strife between members was hard, but essential to understanding the community.

Many of my interviews went over an hour, and, because of my involvement with the community, were sometimes more intimate than is typical of other research interactions. A few participants cried during interviews or discussed events and feelings that were clearly on the

edge of their comfort zone. In one interview that was particularly challenging for me, my participant (someone I've been acquainted with for almost 20 years from areas of my life beyond Carapace) said that he sometimes feels intimidated by me. His feeling is something I've occasionally encountered from other friends, who mistook my initial awkwardness for judgment. Being shy can easily be mistaken for being aloof. It is something I try to work on, and it was a little embarrassing for me to be reminded that I am sometimes so awkward I make others uncomfortable.

This same participant also asked me to critique the story he had told that night. Perhaps this was a compliment, and a sign that he now welcomes my judgment. I felt put on the spot, as I truly had not anticipated this happening during an interview. I had to change mental gears to remember his story and then think of a couple of constructive comments. This participant and I both belonged to the same college literary society (though, at different times). Constructive feedback is a central part of the literary society. This relationship may have also played into his request.

Because I asked interviewees a number of questions about themselves, I tried to give honest responses to anything they asked me during our conversation. This level of intimacy with, and expectation from, participants is a foreseeable consequence of a method that not only involves the researcher more closely with the activities of the community, but also involves the community more closely with the research.

Limitations

This study is limited in that it looks at only one reality storytelling event. Although what happens at Carapace will bear some resemblance to what happens at other reality storytelling shows, Carapace can not be considered a model for the entire reality storytelling movement. The Moth, which is perhaps the best known reality storytelling show, and upon which other

shows have been based (including, originally, Carapace) differs from Carapace in some important ways. The Moth, as I will discuss later, holds competitive story slams which hopeful storytellers and audience members alike must pay to attend. Moth venues also tend to be more theatrical with raised stages and stage lighting. I am aware of some of these differences, but have not taken such a close look at The Moth. Nor have I learned, yet, about other local and national shows which will have their own unique variations. This study of Carapace is a foundation upon which a greater understanding of reality storytelling can be built.

Another limitation of the study is that only one of my participants, Cris Gray, was not white. Although I believed I had reached theoretical saturation near the end of my study, I later realized that including more people of color in my study might have added to the conversation on inclusivity and diversity at Carapace, and it may have deepened or even changed my understanding of “safety.”

CHAPTER 4: CARAPACE AS A SAFE SPACE

Having had prior experience with Carapace, and having done some research on reality storytelling, I began my study with a sense that reality storytelling prioritizes the safety of the storyteller. The teller can say whatever she wants and has no responsibility for keeping the audience safe.

Again and again my participants asserted that Carapace is a safe space. It is a central characteristic of Carapace, and what makes the event, as it exists, possible. I found that many of the information practices of the community were meant to create safety. As I learned, I also saw that safety is not nearly as clear cut as I initially assumed. The storyteller is privileged with a much higher degree of free speech than is common in some other performance situations. However, audience safety is also important. The Carapace community just takes care of the audience in a different way.

Space

The venue.

First, the organizers took great care to secure a venue that feels generally safe. Lance Colley, the original host and one of the founders, described looking for a venue that gave people the same feeling of security that swaddling gives to an infant:

At the time Joyce was
doing a lot of photography with newborn babies.
Two of the big things that newborn babies
in capturing really good pictures of them is
confinement and warmth.
That was the two things.
We took that attitude.
We want this nice warm environment.
We need it to be fairly confined.

The organizers wanted Carapace attendees to feel like they were being embraced by the venue, feeling safety as a tangible physical sensation.

As a public place, Manuel's provides some inherent safety, in that no one is captive.

Randy Osborne, organizer, described it as:

a place where
if it gets too uncomfortable
I can just leave and go in the other room and
have a drink at the bar.
I don't have to-
It's sort of
what do you call it
a safe space.
I forget what the phrase is for that
but it's a public place where
nothing can really go wrong
and you don't have to engage in anything if you don't want to
you can just get up and leave.

Not only is Manuel's a public place, it is not a theater. Although some customs around performance etiquette are observed at Carapace, people feel more free to move around during the show in the bar than they would in a theater.

During my time at Carapace, before and during the study, I saw people leave the room during the show. I assumed they were using the restroom or taking a call. I have gotten up during the show to use the restroom. I didn't do this during the study, but earlier as a Carapace regular, I usually used the restroom during, rather than between stories. If my name was in the hat, it was safest for me to go right at the start of a story, so I could be back before they pulled the next name, in case it was mine! I agree with Randy's assessment that audience members can feel free to come and go. Even if they are stepping out because they don't like a story, others at Carapace aren't likely to know this.

Manuel's was renovated in 2016, displacing Carapace to another local bar, Venkman's, for several months. There was some concern that the feel of the venue might not be the same once they returned. Tom McGowan, a regular attendee and storyteller, said that:

when they rebuilt it
you know
they took a little bit of the grime away
but they left the heart and soul here.
Things are a bit different since the renovation but the heart and soul remain.

The room.

Having a room for Carapace within Manuel's has been incredibly important for making it feel safe.

I mean, the back room,
it felt like a safe space –
even because
like we had the physical door that
you know you could open and close.
You know that door's closed and everybody is there for the storytelling,
and they have that one purpose in mind.
It just felt like you know
we're all in this together.
And nobody's just wandering in
so you have a safe space
to say what you want to say
and you know you're in there with a supportive environment. (D. Russell)

A closed room ensures that everyone who is there, is there for stories. It also physically demarcates the bounds of the community. There is literally an in-group and an out-group.

The importance of the closed room became more apparent while Carapace was meeting at Venkman's, where they weren't separated from other patrons of the bar.

At Venkman's,
there are people they came for dinner.
They didn't know there was a show going on.
They're not trying to be disruptive.
They're not like heckling or booing
or anything like that.
But they're just not-
Oh there's a show?
And they're having conversations with

whoever they came to dinner with. (C. Gray)

Carapace storytellers are used to having audience members who actually want to hear stories.

The room set aside for Carapace at Manuel's helps keep out people who don't want to be an audience.

The room that Carapace currently occupies at Manuel's does not have a closing door, but the community has found another way to shore up the boundaries. From my field notes:

The doorways have been covered with black curtains. I recall my mother saying that the noise from the other areas of the bar was a problem when Carapace first moved back to Manuel's and the curtains are meant to dampen this noise.

The curtains cut noise from other areas of the bar and people also have to walk through them to get into the room. The demarcation of this area as a space for Carapace is more clear than if the doorways were to remain open, seemingly inviting a free flow of traffic. Although attendees can come and go, this space is set aside for Carapace and is made separate from the rest of the bar.

Not every single thing about the room in Manuel's is physically comfortable. I suffered from butt-fatigue toward the end of the November 2017 show, which went past 9pm. The chairs are hard. Furthermore, not all the chairs face the stage. On more than one occasion I sat with my chair sideways to the table, turning my body between the storyteller and my dinner. The length of a typical Carapace show (one and a half hours) happens to correspond nicely, for me at least, with the length of time I am comfortable sitting at Manuel's.

Refreshments.

Other physical comforts help add to the general feeling of safety provided by Manuel's Tavern. Organizer, Joyce Mitchell pointed out that bars make good venues:

One of the things I figured out early on
I wanted a bar.
You need a bar.
You need a place where people have a few drinks
and have some food.

Attendees can eat and drink at the bar, increasing their feelings of physical safety and comfort.

The alcohol present at the bar is a comfort to some, but a danger to others. Eleanor Brownfield shared how coming to Manuel's can be challenging:

I'm a recovering alcoholic
so it's a little weird
to go to a bar
but I do.
I do.
I'm far enough along [knock on wood]
that I can handle it.
It's not ever been a problem
except once.
Shannon McNeal had a scotch
right
there. [tapped table]
And
I had to ask Shannon Turner to change seats with me
so I wasn't smelling it.
'Cause scotch is what I loved.

The presence of alcohol at Manuel's makes the place a bit less safe for Eleanor, but she comes anyway.

Although it is nice to gather where there is food, not everyone enjoys the options at Manuel's:

I really do wish when they'd remodeled the place
they'd added somewhat healthier options to the
dinner menu though. (I. Campbell)

Ian would prefer healthier menu items. Like Eleanor, he attends Carapace in spite of the food and drink. These things are not part of the attraction.

The performance space.

Within the venue of Manuel's Tavern, the organizers shape the room to create a storytelling space. They move tables away from the center of the back wall to make a stage. They move a series of small round tables, some displaced by the stage, into a long line down the middle of the room. This creates one long table in the middle, with other rectangular and

larger round tables occupying the area around the long table and the stage. People sitting at the long table are like the front row. However, those on the stage side of the table have to turn around to face the storytellers.



Figure 6. Carapace stage (Carapace, 2017)

The stage.

The stage gives storytellers a place to stand and lets the audience know where to look. That long table down the middle may just be the best way to deal with the little round tables that had to move. It has an added, or intended, benefit of forcing more communal seating. You can't really sit by yourself at Carapace. Even if you try, the room fills up, and a stranger in need of a seat may join you. The chain of little tables also forms a kind of front row. Audience members sit at tables all around the stage. Some are even a bit behind the storyteller, if the teller doesn't stand up against the wall. That row of tables, though, is where the storyteller's gaze will be directed if s/he faces forward.

Lance said that forgoing a raised stage was a deliberate decision. An overly ostentatious stage would make the storytellers feel unsafe.

It was back to that intention of
creating
this safe environment.
We felt like
putting 'em on stage
even a small one
and putting a spotlight on 'em-
Now we cross that line from
telling the story to a group of people to
an actual performance.

Cris said that by just clearing a small space for the stage, it feels like "campfire storytelling" or "telling stories in a living room." The stage suggests what is happening is social or cultural performance.

Lance said that physical closeness between the tellers and audience was important:

We also wanted to keep
the tellers close to the audience.
Physically close.
Again not
put them on the stage
not have this huge gaping distance between
where they're talking and where the
folks are seated.
We wanted to emphasize that
connection.

It is easier for the storyteller and audience to connect when they are on the same level and physically near each other. Tom McGowan confirmed that that is his experience:

But particularly in this room
you are a lot closer
and you're not on a stage
and the contact is-
maybe I've evolved but I think maybe the room helps to
stay in touch with people.

He does truly feel closer to the audience, both physically and emotionally.

On a hot stage, the storyteller would feel like s/he was part of an aesthetic or theatrical performance and would feel obligated to give something more to the audience. Randy saw this happen. Venkman's, where Carapace took place during the renovation of Manuel's Tavern, has a hotter stage. It is raised, with a microphone, and stage lighting.

A lot of our people didn't like it very much at all.
And I'm convinced that part of it is
they were on an elevated stage
under lights.
And it
it raises the bar
all of the sudden it raises the bar like
I've gotta be Ellen Degeneres
or Louis CK or something.
There're lights on me
and I gotta mic.
I gotta be funny.
I gotta be entertaining people
who want more of what I'm offering them. (R. Osborne)

The hot stage makes the storytellers feel more obligated to be entertaining.

Terri Sarratt confirmed, that, as a storyteller, she was very uncomfortable with the stage at Venkman's.

I hated
being up on a lifted platform.
It was a stage.
And storytelling for me is-
that's just inappropriate.
Inappropriate.
Just felt like
I'm up here
and you're down there.
I gotta perform
somehow.
Just didn't like it.

Benjamin said that it was hard to connect with the audience at Venkman's. One time, however, he did make a big impact on the audience by using the stage as a prop in his story:

The only time that I was ever able to connect as easily
with the crowd at Venkman's
was when I was standing on the stage

talking about suicide
talking about how at one point I thought about
jumping off a balcony
and was standing on a literal ledge
above everyone else
as I said it.
It startled the hell out of people.

In order to connect, Benjamin had to make the stage not a stage, but a balcony. He used the physical space to make the audience feel that they were physically in the story with him. They weren't in a theater, or in a living room. They were below the balcony, looking up, and wondering if he would jump. This is a lot to ask of a storyteller, though. Furthermore, the stage doesn't make a great prop in most stories. It worked in this one instance, but mostly it is safer for the storytellers if they don't have to work that hard to make a connection.

The downside of the cool stage is that it doesn't increase the visibility of the storyteller as much as a raised stage does.

There's no real identifiable stage space.
It's hard to see
from many places in the room. (S. Turner)

For those further away or in an odd corner of the room, the storyteller isn't that visible. This arguably makes the storyteller seem more disconnected.

One of the advantages of not having stage lighting is that the storyteller can see the audience. This aids in the feeling of connection the organizers were hoping to foster. However, seeing the audience is intimidating for some storytellers. Roy Green was a radio DJ in college and liked not seeing his audience.

I find it much easier to just
talk into a microphone in a room
knowing that it's going out
to probably
well when I was a student
DJ
I knew our average listenership was about two thousand.
So that was much easier to me
than

talking directly to
a hundred or so
people here.

The microphone.

The microphone may be the hottest thing about the Carapace stage, in the sense that it makes the storyteller's voice higher definition. The mic is a "necessary evil."

Randy says that Carapace uses the microphone so people can be heard:

Because a big part of the underlying
motive for the event is
to allow more people to be heard.
This is a very literal manifestation of it
'cause if you can't hear them
they aren't gonna be heard
either in the literally
sound waves hitting the eardrums sense or
recognized and acknowledged sense.

The microphone literally gives the storytellers a voice by amplifying their voice.

Or course, the microphone isn't "natural." It doesn't quite fit with the living room, talking with your friends, illusion that the organizers try to create. Some of the storytellers are not very comfortable with the mic. Randy has seen tellers

who are paying too much attention to the mic.
They're staring at it and talking to it
and that's just a matter of relaxing.

Lance found some of the discomfort amusing:

And oh god
I loved watching people come and like
got the microphone on a death grip
the whole time they're talking.

Unfortunately, the microphone doesn't always work as well as it could:

Also
the acoustics in the new room are wretched.
And
the microphone really needs to be turned-
The speakers really need to be turned louder.
A lot of times it's very difficult to hear the storyteller

especially if you're sitting
near one of the entrances to the room.
Because the ambient noise will override
what the speaker is saying. (I. Campbell)

I observed that when tellers were too quiet, it was often because they weren't speaking directly into the microphone. Cris would occasionally try to educate people on how to use the mic between stories. From my field notes:

He said it is a dynamic mic. You have to hold it close to your mouth like JZ and point it at your mouth like you are a unicorn...with the horn coming out of your mouth.

The microphone is hard to use, and that is a barrier for these volunteer storytellers, who are mostly not seasoned performers.

The current microphone is also cordless. The upside of this is that storytellers don't get tangled up in the cord. The downside is that it doesn't fit in the mic stand well, so storytellers mostly end up holding it. This is not comfortable for everyone. As someone who uses her hands while speaking, I find that holding a microphone forces me to really think about my hands and plan out any essential hand motions. Two-handed motions are mostly impossible.

Theresa Davis tried to put the microphone back in the stand before telling her story at the August 2017 show. From my fieldnotes:

She insisted that the mic go back in the mic stand because she doesn't like holding penises and the mic is shaped like a penis. The mic doesn't fit in the stand well, which, I think is why it is so rarely in. She said, "oh and it don't fit!" Cris helped her get the mic in the stand.

There are many reasons a storyteller might not want to hold the microphone. The fact that it is so hard to put in the stand is uncomfortable.

The Ritual

The organizers, host, and community make a safe space for storytelling through the ritual of Carapace.

Performance.

The storytelling that happens at Carapace is a performance; not a social performance, like those we engage in whenever in social situations. It is more a cultural or aesthetic performance. The organizers indicate that it is a performance by creating a stage and providing a microphone. The host then invites storytellers onto the stage.

It is a performance.

Although the performance aspect of Carapace can be intimidating, the fact that it is a performance grants the storytellers some privileges. Amanda Roundtree, an occasional Carapace attendee with a background in theater, talked about the ritual of performance:

I think because it's that
it's just like theater
it is also kind of like a safe space.
And it's that ritual thing right?
It's like we are creating a place
where this is the type of thing that happens onstage.
A person will come up
and they will tell a personal story
and we are to listen right?
It's that ritualistic like
as an audience member
I know my place.
And as a storyteller I know my place.
Those on stage speak. Those in the audience listen.

In a normal conversation, taking too long of a turn, for example, to tell a personal story, can be considered rude. In a storytelling performance, the speaker is given permission to take that time. Performing is a safe way to share stories because the storytellers know they are allowed to speak for longer than they could in casual conversation.

Benjamin Carr talked about having this permission to speak:

Here you don't have to ask
for permission
to tell a story
for people to listen to it
because the room is designed

for the stories primarily.
It's set up.
It's announced.
There's a sign.
There are rules.
There's a hat.
There's a structure.
And
the hosts are generally
capable of
facilitating
people to
follow the rules.

Once you are on stage, you get to speak. Building on that privilege is the related privilege of having people actually listen to you.

The Carapace audience tends to play the audience role appropriately and listen.

I'm always appreciative
because most people are polite
even when they're not
engaged.
There will be cast down glances
or looking for the waiter
they're looking at their cup
but they're
being polite. (J. Mitchell)

The bar setting, as discussed earlier, helps audience members feel freer to move around, and even leave the room during a story if they need to. However, when they are in the room, audience members listen, or are polite.

Cris Gray, the current host, regularly states during his opening remarks that Carapace is a "safe space" and there is "no heckling." Audience members are limited in the ways they can respond. They laugh, they applaud, and occasionally they make single word exclamations. "No heckling" became an explicitly stated expectation as a reaction to a heckling incident early in Carapace's history.

Randy Osborne described the incident:

He gets up

and he's about 20 seconds in
and
he stops
and there's what I think is a dramatic pause but then
I've been listening to his story
and I'm thinking
the drama-
He hasn't gotten to the point where there's any drama.
I'm staring at him.
Everybody's staring at him.
And he's staring back at the audience.
And he says
I forgot what I was gonna say.
And
everybody's like
awwww.
They're applauding.
Come on.
Just say anything!
Just go on with it!
I thought
maybe this will work.
Maybe this will work.
That was the one and only night
we've ever had
where there was a heckler
in the crowd.
She'd been there throughout the show.
She was very drunk.
And storytellers would be up telling their stories
and she'd be doing this [hand waving]
to the server
to get another drink.
So when our man reached his
stymied point
and just was confessing that
I don't know what I was going to say
she says
Ah
sit down.
And that snapped his
spine.
And he sat down.

Roy Green, the storyteller to whom this happened, happily takes credit for the "Roy

Rule":

And that's what instituted the
admonishment during the
preliminaries where they say
If you don't like the story
just keep quiet
another one will come up in five minutes.
So that's the Roy Rule.

Lance Colley, the original host, reacted immediately to the heckling:

I got up and
told people look
I just want to remind everybody
we want this to be a welcoming
environment.
Some of these stories are difficult
to tell.
We ask that
you be patient with everybody.
And I looked at her and I said,
We certainly ask you to keep things to yourself.

Ever since, "no heckling" has been part of the introductory speech at the beginning of the show.

There are times when the safety of the storytellers and the safety of the audience members seem to be at odds with one another. Storytellers can say things that make audience members uncomfortable, but audience member can't say things that make storytellers uncomfortable. Certainly, the organizers want everyone to feel as safe as possible. However, the purpose of the event is the sharing of true, personal stories. Creating a safe space for story has meant giving more speaking privileges to the storytellers.

Carapace walks a fine line when it comes to performance. Audience members listen, but they don't have to stay in their seats. Storytellers are invited to perform: they get on stage, they have a microphone, they get to speak. However, storytellers are also encouraged to think of what happens at Carapace as not a performance.

It isn't a performance.

Although the stage signals that what happens at Carapace is a performance, the minimal, cool, nature of the stage suggests that it isn't an aesthetic or theatrical performance.

But it was anything to distract-
as dumb as it sounds
especially given
what the point of it was
anything to distract them from the fact that they are
standing in front of a whole bunch of people.
That's what we want them to get away from. (L. Colley)

Lance suggested that the set-up could help storytellers imagine they weren't in front of an audience.

It was trying to capture that idea of
sitting in front of a campfire or
sitting in somebody's house
or sitting down on a porch
with someone while still trying to accommodate 30, 40
or however many people. (L. Colley)

The storyteller is supposed to feel like they aren't part of a staged performance at all.

Lance talks about creating the feel of something more like social performance. The storyteller is really just talking to their friends. Lance asserted:

You're not performers.
You're telling a story.
You're sharing with us what happened to you
and your experiences.

He was very insistent that it wasn't a performance, and the storytellers were supposed to feel like they didn't have to perform.

Benjamin's experience is that the cool stage does make storytellers feel more like they are speaking to friends instead of performing for an audience.

What makes Manuel's a safe place is
it's all on the same level.
You're walking from among the crowd.
The stage isn't a stage.
It wasn't even in the other room.

It's just another place that people can tread across
and go to the bathroom toward if they
want to.
And it makes you all feel familiar.
So that even when you are talking about yourself
and you're saying something personal
you're just folks. (B. Carr)

Randy hoped that people might walk into the room and feel that what was going on was
organic, like it had just happened on its own.

Now you just walk in and
somebody's talking
oh it's that guy at the microphone
and everyone's leaned in
and there are all these tables crowded around him.
It just sort of looks like somebody snatched a mic and got up and started talking
and other people started listening.
That's the environment that I want to create.
It was probably hundreds of years ago but
at that time
people did sometimes just jump up from the crowd and start talking
and people would start listening to them
just because they wanted to hear what he wanted to say.

That person didn't plan to speak. Those people didn't plan to listen. This moment sprang up on
its own.

This idea that what is happening at Carapace is more like a conversation with friends
than a performance also creates intimacy. The storyteller and audience are physically close to
one another. They can look into one another's eyes during the story. This intimate
unstagedness is a natural partner of reality. Butler (1988) says:

Although the links between a theatrical and a social role are complex and the
distinctions not easily drawn [...], it seems clear that, although theatrical performances
can meet with political censorship and scathing criticism, gender performances in non-
theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social
conventions. Indeed, the sight of a transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and
applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can
compel fear, rage, even violence. The conventions which mediate proximity and
identification in these two instances are clearly quite different. I want to make two
different kinds of claims regarding this tentative distinction. In the theatre, one can say,
'this is just an act,' and de-realize the act, make acting into something quite distinct
from what is real. Because of this distinction, one can maintain one's sense of reality in

the face of this temporary challenge to our existing ontological assumptions about gender arrangements; the various conventions which announce that 'this is only a play' allows strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life. On the street or in the bus, the act becomes dangerous, if it does, precisely because there are no theatrical conventions to delimit the purely imaginary character of the act, indeed, on the street or in the bus, there is no presumption that the act is distinct from a reality; the disquieting effect of the act is that there are no conventions that facilitate making this separation." (p. 527)

Staged performances can typically be dismissed as "just an act," but performances at Carapace are meant to be like the "transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus." They are intimate, real, and sometimes challenge our assumptions.

Because Carapace started out as a MothUp, the changes they have made that distinguish them from The Moth are particularly significant. Both of these changes help make Carapace seem less like a performance.

Carapace has no judging. At Moth story slams, three judging teams are selected from the audience before the show and are briefly coached on how to score the storytellers. After each story, scores are announced and written on an easel that is on stage. At the end of the night the winner is announced. Winners go on to compete in a grand slam against other champions.

Carapace has none of this. No scores. No competition. Just the stories.

I think that if there's a competition going
and it's that more formal setting
you are the storyteller
they are the audience.
The audience people are sitting in audience chairs.
It's not
you sitting at a table
eating a cheeseburger
and then getting up and telling a story
to a bunch of other people sitting at tables eating cheeseburgers
and so forth.
It's more formally framed as a
performer versus audience
not versus audience
performer and audience

type of situation. (I. Campbell)

Ian is hesitant to set this up as an antagonistic relationship, but I'm not. There can be tension between the storyteller and the audience depending on the type of performance required. Just as the hot stage (another feature of The Moth) raises the bar, the competition also makes it clear that storytellers are expected to be entertaining. They get immediate feedback on how entertaining they were from audience judges. By doing away with the judging, the Carapace organizers were intentionally making Carapace less of a performance.

Understandably, the competitive aspect of The Moth could easily create tension between storytellers (who are also audience members). Benjamin Carr, who attends both Carapace and The Moth told me:

[lower volume voice] I want to be the best.
It's so-
I'm very competitive.
I'm
kind of mean sometimes.

Winning, just isn't something Carapace storytellers have to think about.

Randy repeatedly asserts in Facebook posts for upcoming Carapace shows: "It's free and always will be." Attendees do not have to purchase a ticket to get in.

Joyce said that not selling tickets helps Carapace feel like less of a performance.

I do think that
most of the time
the audience is coming here.
They know that they're not getting a guarantee.
They are not paying money
which helps a lot.
The expectations are not necessarily low
but they're not necessarily high.
We do make effort of
even telling-
these are not
performers.
What you're getting is not
a show.
Even though it is a show

you know what I mean? (J. Mitchell)

A hotter stage may imply that storytellers owe the audience a performance, but tickets quite literally say they do. Attendees paid to see a show. Not ticketing is a deliberate way to remove this feeling of obligation.

The fact that entry is free makes the show more inclusive, as far as who is able to come. This is important because audience members are storytellers. They have to come to the event first, and having no entry fee makes it easier to walk through the door.

Cris often states enthusiastically, "This is a free show!" which I take to mean, "Can you believe what you are getting for free?" Certainly it is an experience that would be worth paying for. But if you had to pay, it wouldn't be the same experience.

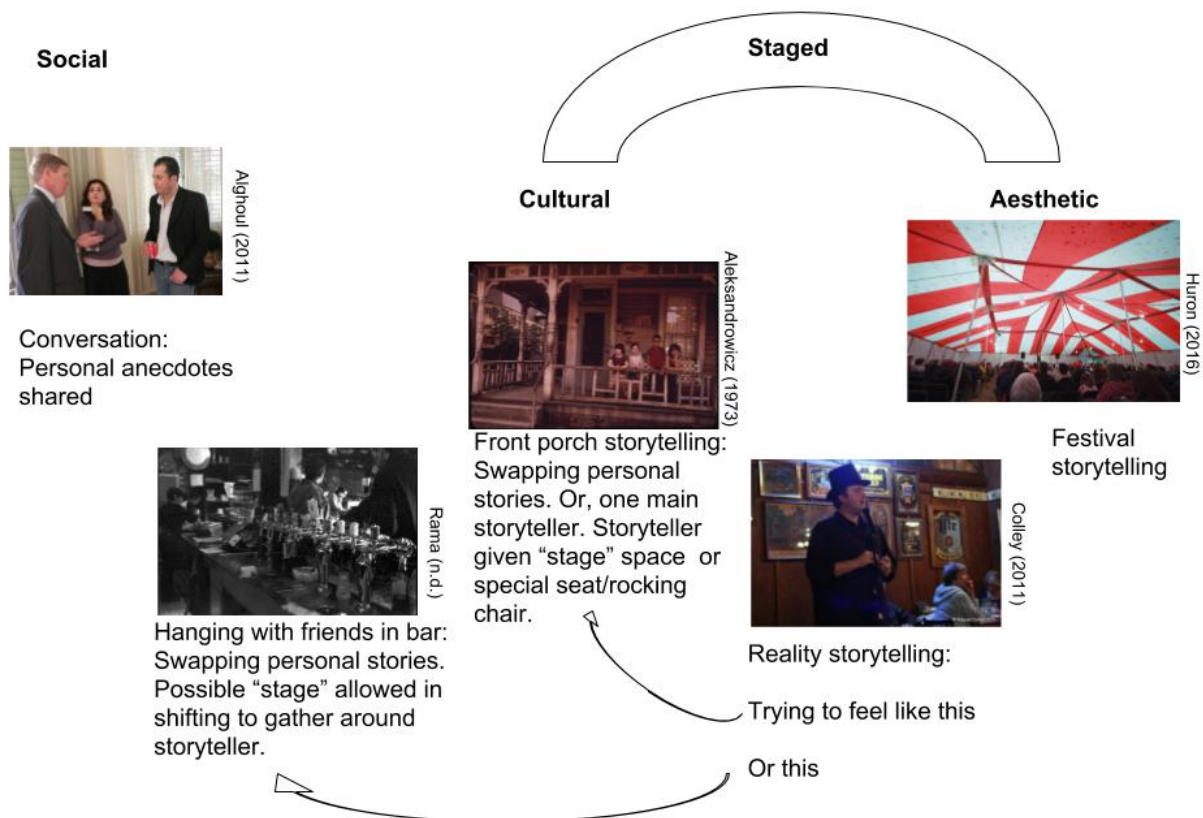


Figure 7. Spectrum of Personal Storytelling Performance

Going back to Schechner's (2002) performance continuum (p. 143), the fact that Carapace has a stage and sets aside a time and place for performance nudges it closer to the aesthetic end of the spectrum. In some ways the stage makes Carapace look more like festival storytelling than like other types of storytelling. However the fact that the stage is so minimal, combined with other signals that this is "not a performance" make Carapace feel more like front porch storytelling, or hanging out with friends in a bar.

The rules.

The rules of Carapace are part of the ritual and help make it a place for true, personal stories. There is a theme, and the storytellers have roughly 5 minutes each. That tellers are supposed to be telling true, personal stories is also a more or less stated rule.

Theme.

Randy Osborne, one of the organizers, publishes the theme on the Carapace Facebook page earlier in the month and often encourages creative interpretations. His prompt for the *Left Behind* show in October, 2017 illustrates the many ways a theme can be understood:

Maybe you were skipped over for a promotion at work ... or dumped by an uncaring mate ... or forced to fend for yourself that summer at home when the rest of the family went on vacation. Or maybe you went on the vacation and they abandoned you someplace, brat. You were left behind.

Tell!

Go wider if you want. Did you strategically place a meaningful memento for a certain person to find after you became history in his or her life? Did you find such a memento that was strategically placed for you, after things went bad? There's a story around it, for sure. Relics matter.

Go even wider. October's Halloween month, so maybe put together a five to seven-minute story about the ghost spirit left behind to wander the upstairs of that old house you had a bad feeling about renting to begin with. The chains clanking and the moans and so forth. (This, by the way, is as close as I'll ever get to a Carapace theme related to any specific holiday, month, or season. I just can't do it.)

Go wider still, if you dare. Go nuts! Were you riding a tram in Belgium late one afternoon some years ago, the light slanting the way it does there, glistening on the rain-wet cobblestones, when some European flirt pinched your nicely rounded posterior not on the right cheek but the other cheek instead? Your "left behind"? And things went from there? This actually happened to me. (Lie.) (Except for Belgium, the tram, and a prostitute who never touched me.)

The obvious interpretation of any given theme is not the one that a storyteller has to go with.

The themes give potential attendees some idea of what to expect from a particular show, and hopefully move them to actually attend. Joyce Mitchell described thinking hard about themes that will appeal to storytellers and audience members:

We try to do it with our themes.
We try to come up with a theme that has a healthy measure of conflict
but also a healthy measure of a range
that not only attracts a storyteller
but the audience member.
We're always trying to figure out
where those two will meet
and have that perfect dance.

The themes are safe because they give people some idea of what to expect. For those who are first time or irregular attendees, they help indicate that this might be a show they would be particularly interested in because of the stories that are likely to be told around the given theme.

Because of this expectation-setting, audience members can get upset when storytellers aren't sticking particularly close to the theme. Shannon Turner sat with a newcomer who felt that several stories he heard that night were off topic:

The first part was hard
because many of the stories did not have anything to do with the
theme.
They were still okay stories
but a friend of mine brought
her new beau that she's dating
they kept looking over me like
What the hell
do people even know what sour grapes mean?
That's really troubling to some people.
They feel like
the stories have to do with the theme. (S. Turner)

Once the organizers put the theme out there, it is up to the storytellers to stick to it or not. There are no real repercussions of not staying on theme. At The Moth, storytellers get lower scores if they are off theme; this is one of the things the volunteer judges are instructed

to mark storytellers down for. Carapace has no judging. Despite the fact that Carapace storytellers could tell any story they wish with no real penalty, during my observations storytellers appeared to *try* and connect their stories to the themes. Audience members may not have agreed with the storytellers' interpretations of the themes, like the night of *Sour Grapes*, but I witnessed no stories that were totally and unabashedly off topic.

Sometimes storytellers feel the need to actually say the theme in the story or explain how the story connects to the theme. Jack Walsh made a joke of this in his *In the Dark* story.

From my field notes:

In Genesis, Lot's wife looked back in the dark [Jack said "check" like he checked off getting the theme] and was punished by being turned into a pillar of salt. Jack got off easier.

Jack's story had very little to do with the theme of *In the Dark* other than the fact that he worked the phrase into the story. However, the audience seemed to love it anyway.

Shannon Turner, who had some concerns about people being off-theme during the *Sour Grapes* show raved on Facebook the next day:

I'm so sorry for those of you in the world who do not know the pleasure, intellectual stimulation, international political/literary/Biblical education, sexual tension, and pure hilarity that is a Jack Walsh story at Carapace.

Storytellers try to stick to the theme. When they don't do a great job, sometimes audience members mutter about it, and sometimes they don't care.

The themes particularly make Carapace a safe space for story because they help make the stories happen. The themes help storytellers come up with personal stories to tell.

have a theme
because people need a handle
even if you say
Come and tell the story you've been dying to tell.
People still need
something to hold onto
and a theme gives them that. (J. Mitchell)

This was my experience when I first came to Carapace. I didn't think I had many personal stories, but the themes made me think of new stories month after month.

Tricia Stearns took this even further:

I have a lot of stories.
I live a story every day.
I'm wondering
do enough people realize?
I think that's what's fun about the themes
because it makes you think.

Tricia has begun to see the stories in her everyday life, outside of Carapace. Many messages are shared at Carapace - take-aways from the individual stories. One of the messages of Carapace is "you have a story to tell."

Time limit.

The five-minute time limit is another rule, and part of the ritual that adds safety and comfort for Carapace attendees.

Five minutes is a comfortable length of time for most of the storytellers to speak. Each performer is sharing *only* a story, not a one wo/man show. Lance Colley, one of the founders of Carapace, and the original host, shared that the ten-minute time limit they began with was too long:

Because all of a sudden that ten-minute time limit
people felt
like they had to use the entire ten minutes.
You'd get people stumbling up and use
Uh um uh
trying to drag it all out.

Storytellers could easily feel that they needed to give the audience more than they had.

Carapace lasts for an hour and a half. When storytellers stick to the time limit, more people get to tell stories. This is why storytellers and audience members alike can get a little upset with people who go over time. Will Young, a regular Carapace storyteller, who can be long winded said:

I feel like if there are regrets with Carapace
it's more likely to be about
not cutting enough
or not being respectful of the time that I'm given.

The fact that Carapace is an open mic show and *anyone* can tell a story starts to mean less if a handful of storytellers monopolize the time.

Like the rule of sticking to the theme, the rule of remaining within the time limit is not strictly enforced. Storytellers do get some feedback on this with a time warning from Randy. In the early days of Carapace, Randy or Joyce would shake a maraca: once at 5 minutes to indicate the storyteller needed to wrap it up, and again at 6 minutes to indicate that the storyteller really needed to be done. I have never seen a Carapace storyteller forced to leave the stage, even after s/he went over 6 minutes. Ian Campbell, a longtime regular, has made a similar observation:

But I've never seen anybody
I've never seen Cris [current host]
or Lance [original host]
step forward and be like
okay that's it.

During my absence from Carapace, they switched from a maraca to a bicycle light. Randy explained that the light was "less intrusive." Everyone could hear the maraca, but as an audience member, I hardly ever noticed a storyteller getting the light. Randy said the light is "hard to deny seeing," so storytellers are more certain to get the message. But, it is less likely to "jar the story off course" like the sound of the rattle sometimes would. Although Randy does want storytellers to get the message that their time is up, he delivers this information gently, trying not to disrupt the story.

Randy continued, in a comment on the blog:

Really, though, the timing is not something we've had to worry about for a while, except for a very few chronic over-tellers. Not sure why. It could be that not policing it so rigorously led tellers to find their own limits, discipline.

Whatever the cause, I have to agree that people tend to not completely take advantage of not being thrown off stage. Stories that go over are only over by a minute or two, not twenty.

The bicycle light is less noticeable from the audience's perspective, and this is another kindness to the storyteller. The audience is also less likely to judge the storyteller for going over time, because they might not even realize it has happened. Some audience members, however, keep track of the time on their own. Benjamin Carr told me:

At the same time
part of me is also looking over at Ian
and Ian's got that 8 minutes on the stopwatch thing.
Because I told Ian to start timing him
four or five months ago and Ian-
'Cause I had gotten to the point with Ian where I was like
you'll notice that such-and-such does this
such-and-such does that
such-and-such does this
and such-and-such can't tell a story in under eight minutes.
A horrible bitchy thing that I do.

As in other areas, the organizers try to provide some safety and comfort, but they can't guarantee the behavior of the individuals present. Benjamin and Ian don't seem to do anything with this information other than amuse themselves. It may be "bitchy" as Benjamin says, but it seems to be doing no real harm to the storyteller.

Although ten minutes was too long, five minutes is short, and many storytellers have difficulty staying within this limit. It can be stressful for the storyteller. During a story I told, I had trouble fully appreciating the laughter I was getting because it was taking away from my time. From my field notes:

There was a lot of laughing. My story was pretty funny. But it was more than I expected. And sometimes people went on so long I was kind of ready for them to stop so I could keep telling.

Will Young shared with me what goes through his head when he gets the time warning during a story:

Sometimes I

I don't know
especially if the
bell or
laser pointer or whatever goes off
sometimes I feel like I can see like
a stopwatch
like counter
increasing ever higher
and I'm like
all right
I've got to quickly jettison
everything else
where is the
nearest exit so
I can finish this?

Finding out your time is up can be very uncomfortable.

The bite-sized length of Carapace stories, offers audience members a degree of protection, should they hear a story they don't like. Lance, the original host, advised audience members that they could survive a five-minute story:

And at that point I started working something in my little intro speech
where I'm like
you know and if you don't enjoy someone's story
that's fine.
We just ask you to remain respectful
because the person next to you may be enjoying that story.
And ultimately
it's only five minutes.
You can last five minutes in a story that you don't like.

A version of this continues as part of Cris's opening.

Terri Sarratt, a regular attendee, said she takes this advice to heart when she hears a story she doesn't like:

Just
just waiting.
Like Cris says
you know
you don't like it
five minutes it'll be over. So
you can tolerate-
I can tolerate it.

Audience members are more willing to put up with uncomfortable stories because they don't last long.

"No comedy routines, no political rants, no poetry."

The storytellers are supposed to be telling stories. Cris states during his opening remarks "no comedy routines, no political rants, no poetry" - basically, no non-stories. Randy wrote in the Facebook event preceding one of the Carapace shows:

People around here seem to appreciate true personal storytelling ... the kind without political rants or general axe-grinding, i.e., lectures or poetry or singing (unless it's part of the story) (you see what I did there. Guidelines).

It is possible someone could take the stage and use that platform to speak whatever is on their mind or do any kind of performance. That isn't in the spirit of the event. There are some guidelines, which help make Carapace what it is.

Limiting the performances to story helps make the audience safe, once again, by setting expectations. Storytellers (probably) won't take advantage of their stage time to lecture them.

Shannon Turner noted:

I will say one other thing people
do tend to do is they
tend to drop a political moment in every once in awhile
even though it's requested that they don't.

I have witnessed these "moments." I've also had interviewees disagree on whether or not a story with political content violated the rules. Was it a rant or a story? The crowd seems to tolerate it if it seems story-ish enough.

Because so many of the community members have similar political leanings (as will be further discussed), tellers may also feel emboldened to make political comments, assuming they will not alienate or offend anyone.

True and personal.

The “true” and “personal” aspects of the stories are not insisted upon quite as firmly. To Randy, the personal part is tied up with the story part.

In the beginning we used to get people who would tell stories about someone else.
Like my uncle
the horse trainer.
Which is interesting
but is really just an anecdote
unless you had some interaction with him
that makes for a powerful story.

When people have told not-quite-personal stories, there weren’t telling folk tales. They were telling about (presumably, true) things that happened to other people.

In a meta twist, illustrating how entwined Carapace becomes in regular attendees’ lives, some personal stories involve Carapace. From my field notes on a story from the July 2017 Carapace:

Fortunately, Patrick Walker finally got a chemistry job. Unfortunately, his new job conflicted with Carapace, so he wasn’t able to come for a while. But now he’s here!

The happy ending of Patrick’s story was that he was back at Carapace.

Benjamin has performed a whole story about performing at Carapace:

I’ve told that story
on stage about the first time at Carapace.
Like at Stories on the Square
I talked about my first Carapace.

Joining this community can be a formative moment and a story in itself. In explaining to people how I got here (studying reality storytelling) and why I care, I often find myself telling the story of my first time at Carapace. I talk about those first few months when I thought I would run out of personal stories, but never did. I talk about telling a story at Carapace I never thought I could tell anywhere. Those stories are part of my story. Carapace is my personal story.

There is a lot of disagreement on what it means for the stories to be "true." As Benjamin puts it, "emotional truth is different from factual truth." Roy Green also differentiated between kinds of truth:

I kind of take the
direction
at least
I haven't heard it
that much lately but
they used to say
the stories you should tell
should be true
but not necessarily factual.

Lance Colley, the original host, used to say that in his opening remarks, and it also shaped my understanding of "truth" as it pertains to Carapace stories.

Molly Read Woo believes truth is "speaking from the heart":

I think
my great aunt told me this quote
from Shakespeare I think it is from
Polonius' advice to Laertes.
All right
whether this is true or not and I've never looked it up
I'm just taking it straight from my great aunt.
But it's like
above all to thine ownself be true
and so following
as the night the day
thou canst not be false to any man.
And I think
if I speak from my heart
and I'm telling what's true.
Hopefully that's okay.

This "from the heart" truth may not be factually true, but there is an earnestness to it, and a lack of any intent to deceive.

People may embellish elements of their story.

I say
it would take me 10 minutes in the snow
to get the rent-a-car.
That was probably five minutes

felt like ten.
You embellish
the five to ten.
I'm okay with embellishment
for the sake of the
story as long
as it doesn't
distort the truth.
I think there's an acceptable amount of bullshit.
It's a very fine line. (T. Stearns)

Tricia might say it took ten minutes to get the car because it felt like ten minutes, even if, in reality, it was only five. It makes the story sound better but doesn't "distort the truth" at the heart of the story. It isn't just a fine line, it's a line no one seems to agree upon.

Eleanor refers to this kind of thing as "massaging" or "embroidering."

And I don't mean
massaging
or embroidering.
Those are not
to me
cheating.
I even know of an instance when
a teller put two stories together
that weren't really in the same time frame
but it didn't matter
to me.

Ian Campbell said he is a "post-structuralist" and doesn't believe in objective truth at all.

Sometimes his wife attends Carapace with him and hears him tell a story

and it will be about some event that
she knows about
or maybe even was there at the time
and she'll be like
Well that wasn't actually the way it went
and I'm like: It is now.

He is unapologetic in his interpretation of real life events through the lens of his own subjectivity.

Benjamin's mother told him he got multiple details in a story he's been telling about her wrong:

My mother
listened to the helicopter story
and thought it was hilarious.
She liked that I got my stepfather's voice right.
She goes
You know you got every detail of that story wrong
right?
I'm like
What are you talking about?
And that was when I realized like
wait a second
does that mean I can't tell that story anymore?
Knowing that it isn't
true
even though I thought that it was true
because it's true 'cause I thought it was.
Like I've been telling that story for years!
What does this do? (B. Carr)

Benjamin's response isn't to change the story. He wonders if he can still tell the story. The way he tells it really is, to him, the way it happened. There is no story if that isn't what happened.

Audience members allow themselves to be vulnerable while listening to these true, personal stories. They may hear difficult things. They may be quite emotionally moved. When storytellers stray too far from the truth that can feel uncomfortable for listeners, who may even feel betrayed.

Will Young was very upset about a show he went to, which was a showcase of various performers from Atlanta's "live lit" scene.

I went to a Titans of Talking
that was supposed to be
this sort of like
they'd done a show
under the title Titans of Talking
the year before
and it was sort of a collection of like
The 500
and Carapace
and Stories on the Square
and Write Club
and it was sort of like
a showcase

for the Atlanta
literary community
and it was awesome
and I loved that idea
and I loved
that sort of celebration
of the community.
And then the next year
they did it again.
And this year it was
sort of supposed to be a
memorial/fund-raiser
for this person
Gaspar
and I don't remember what last name they used.
And I'm like
I never heard of this person! And
they had Myke Johns and
like Bernie
from Naked City and
all these other people
and I watched it with Sarah Zureick Brown
and her husband David
and we were like maybe in the front row
maybe in the second row
at the Earl [Earl Smith Strand Theatre] and
you know the
each story
was like
it was almost like the person was
completely different.
I'm like
Oh this is so interesting.
This really says something about like our perspective
of people.
And then when it got to intermission
Sarah was like
So there's no person Gaspar right.
This is all completely made up.
And I'm like [Gasp!]
God-dammit you're right!
And I was so pissed off!
So pissed off!
Because it was supposed to be
this person had like
gone missing
his family didn't know where he was
and like

I've had like
Chris Berry [mutual friend from college] went missing
and I didn't hear from him
for years
and then I found out that he was still alive.
And I'm like
I was so
angry!
And I was so upset!
For like such a cheap joke
and then like
as soon as
Sarah pointed it out to me
I could see like
oh of course! Everything-
they were just given his name and like
a thin prompt.
And that's was why this person seems completely different in all these stories.
And like after intermission
Kaylee Pendergrass told one
and I'm like
yeah like
no!
I've been a part of this community longer than she has
there's no way
she knows this fictitious person.
I was so angry!
And it was
horribly timed
because a week later
there was like
a benefit
for someone
like in the arts community in Atlanta
who had cancer
and who needed help paying bills
and I'm like
I don't know is this person real?
I've never heard of this person.
Tell her family to go
hit up Gaspar Fofafa
and get my twenty dollars I paid for that God-damn show!

Will told me that because so many of the tellers came from reality storytelling shows,
where true, personal stories are told, he had gone in with an expectation that the stories were

true. It was also implied in the advertising that Gaspar was a real person, apparently for the sake of the "cheap joke."

Anyone might get upset about being fooled. Terri Sarratt didn't like hearing one teller perform another person's personal story as if it were their own:

Not at Carapace
I heard somebody tell a story
consummate storyteller
tell a story
it was a fabulous story
and then later I heard it from
a professional.
And I was
very disappointed.
I thought
I had admiration for the person's ability
but I felt like I had been roped in.
They had taken somebody else's story
and told it
as if it had happened to them.
And I felt cheated
roped in
lied to.
It doesn't feel good to be lied to.

Even storytellers who perform primarily folktales know it is bad business to tell a story like it is true and personal when it isn't. I interviewed Betty Ann Wylie (one of the founding members of Southern Order of Storytellers, the Georgia storytelling guild) in 2015, as part of another project. Here is something she said:

Sometimes I do tell personal stories. I tell-
But they may be a folktale that I have
turned into a personal story.
The story of the walking catfish.
Now you see
at this point in my life
I've told that so many times.
My Aunt Julia
Daddy's little sister-
Aunt Julia is one of the women
who went fishin' a lot with us when I was a child.
And I used to tell that this happened to me

but I decided
on the advice of Donald Davis,
a very very experienced personal tale teller
that if you tell the story as if it happened to you
and it did not
and it's a story that could not have happened to anybody
you lose-
your audience will lose faith in you.
They won't believe anything you tell 'em
even if you are tellin' them a true experience.
So he would tell about Uncle Frank.
Uncle Frank told me such and such.
Then if they realize by the end of the story
that this couldn't possibly have happened to anybody
he was just as taken in by Uncle Frank
so he's not tricking the children
the audience it's
you know just Uncle Frank
who told him this and he believed it.
So I have Aunt Julia now
catchin' the fish
that she teaches to walk and to live out of the water.

Telling fictional stories as if they happened to you creates a trust issue between the storyteller and audience.

Will was further outraged about the deception at Titans of Talking because of his emotional investment in the cause. He believed that Gaspar was missing. He knows what it is like to worry over a friend who is missing, and for him this is not something to joke about.

Randy Osborne suggested I ask interviewees about how they would feel if they learned a Carapace story wasn't true. Most of the responses were what I expected. They wouldn't like it if the story were an outright lie (a couple people were actually okay with this) but some editing of the facts was acceptable. I was surprised by Randy's feelings on this issue and the importance he places on sticking as precisely with the facts as possible. From an email conversation:

My personal view is that the "objective" facts of a story are imbued with emotional truth and vice versa, so that if a storyteller deliberately plays fast and loose with one, s/he's doing the same with the other. We know as much in our everyday lives. How one feels

emotionally is tied to what one sees, hears, smells, touches in each particular situation - and at a particular time! (Ask anyone who's tried to recreate a situation *exactly* in order to live again a certain emotional feeling. It usually fails.) The principle can't help but carry into story, and how stories are offered.

My initial internal response to this was that there is a spectrum of how much factuality audience members expect from "true, personal stories." Randy falls on the highly factual end, Ian Campbell is at the other end where there is no truth, and most everyone else falls somewhere in the middle and accepts some editing of the facts.

Then, on my last night "in the field" at Carapace, I had an experience that gave me new appreciation of Randy's hardline take on truth. I told a story about a tough time I had in my last job. I left out the fact that I was 7 months pregnant during that time. It wasn't really relevant to the story, although it might have made me an even more sympathetic protagonist. I don't leave this out to be deceptive, but just because it doesn't particularly add, and could be a distracting detail. I've told this story a few times and never included my pregnancy as part of the story. Although I am sort of aware of how things really happened, I now picture the story in my head without the pregnancy. The next morning Facebook showed me a memory of myself performing at Carapace around the time the story took place. And in the picture, I'm pregnant. I was almost startled to see so clearly what I've written out of that episode.

Randy talked about recreating a situation through the details. The more I tell a story the more that becomes, in my head, what actually happened. In my story, I hadn't recreated my original experience. I created a different experience. I think this can be a healthy and good thing when the story is empowering. But it is a little startling to realize I'm losing the truth even in my own mind. There is a safety issue for the storytellers then, as well, when it comes to truth. They may want to think hard about rewriting their life experiences for the sake of a good story.

Breaking the rules.

The Moth. Atlanta. November, 2017. Theme: Control.

Matan was the last storyteller. He said he was a paratrooper in Israel. He was in a bar in Tel Aviv and met a girl. He got her number and she agreed that he could come by her place that Saturday before he went back to the army. Her dad opened the door and started talking about what a good guy Matan was. The girl came in in a wheelchair. He hadn't realized she had a wheelchair when he met her. Her dad told him to take their van which was specially equipped. They went to a movie and she parked her chair in the aisle. A guy tripped over her during the show. At the end of the night she asked him to drive to the park and then said she had always wanted to "do it" on a swing. [Matan was getting his second time warning at this point.] He said they did what they did on the swing. He took her home and her father said he was a really good guy. Most guys just left her on the swing.

This happened at the Atlanta Moth, one day before the November 2017 Carapace. Many people attend both The Moth and Carapace, which was why I went. I was astounded to see someone so blatantly break most of the rules, and to see the reaction that followed.

Matan's "story" was not true, personal, or even really a story. It was a joke, one that some of my friends in the audience had heard before. Matan's story was a "breach" (Turner, 1988, p. 34) of reality storytelling ritual. This audience will listen to difficult breaches that storytellers have experienced and go with them on the journey through the social drama that followed; however, a breach of conduct such as telling a mean joke at The Moth instead of a personal story caused its own social drama.

Even though Matan also went over time, he was not removed from the stage by the host or producer. The immediate repercussions of his actions came through the behavior of the host after his story, and his scores.

The host had those who had not gotten to tell a story that night come up to deliver "one-liners" (this also happens at Carapace and is described more in the section on The Hat). Then, the host tried to move right to announcing the winner of the story slam without getting Matan's scores first. When the producer reminded him he muttered, "not that it matters." The

host did ask the three judging teams for their scores and they were all low. One team gave Matan a 4 out of 10. I had heard the producer giving the teams a crash course in judging at the start of the night, and she had told them tellers should get a 5 just for getting on stage. A 4 is less than the suggested minimum.

The impact of Matan's performance had a continuing effect on the community. Benjamin Carr, a regular storyteller and attendee at both Carapace and The Moth, was sitting next to me while Matan was on stage. He whispered under his breath "I hate him." Afterwards, he vented further on Facebook:

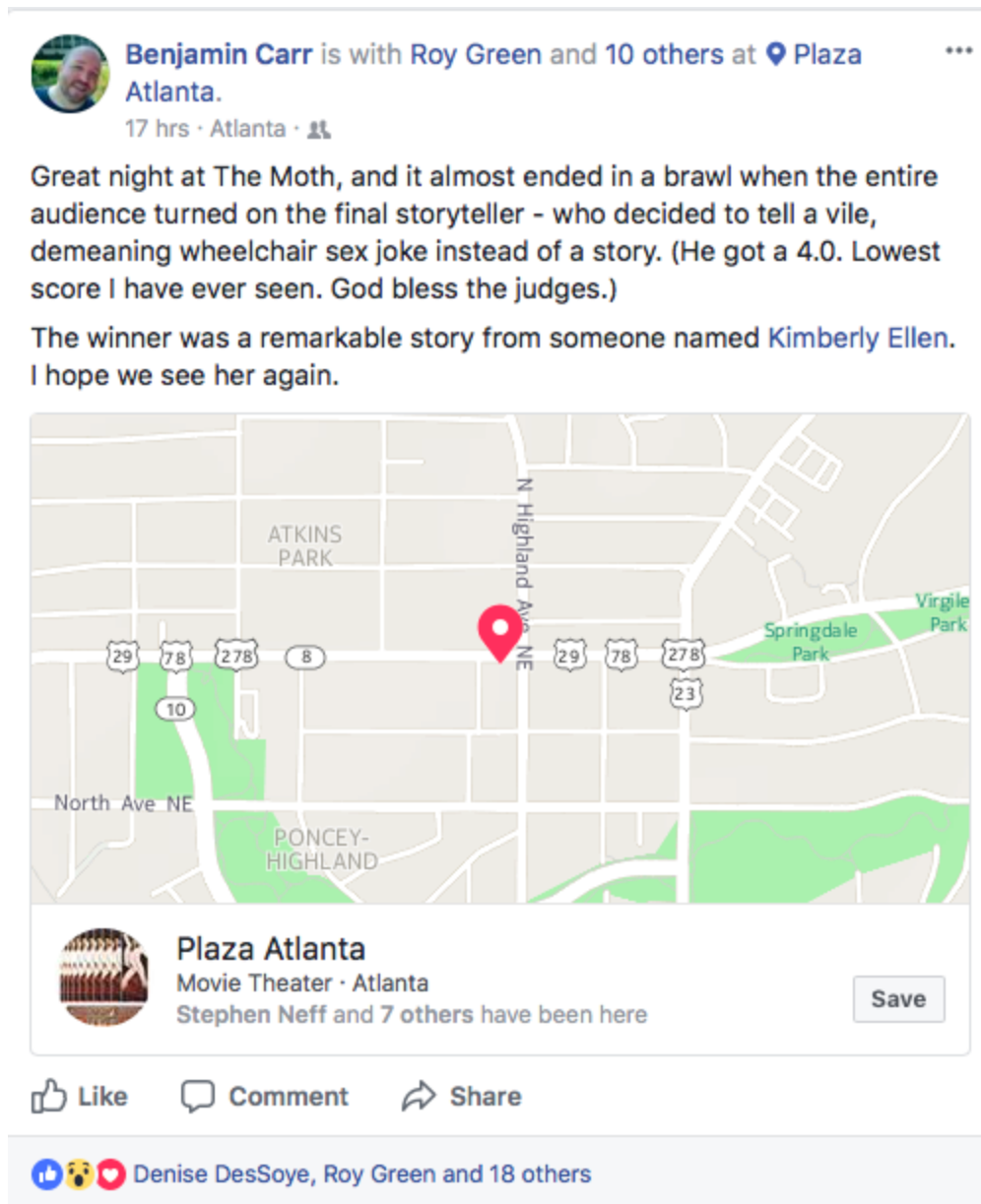


Figure 8. B. Carr Facebook post on Matan's story

Benjamin's read of the audience was that they were ready to get physical over their dislike of Matan's distasteful joke.

The discussion on Benjamin's post:

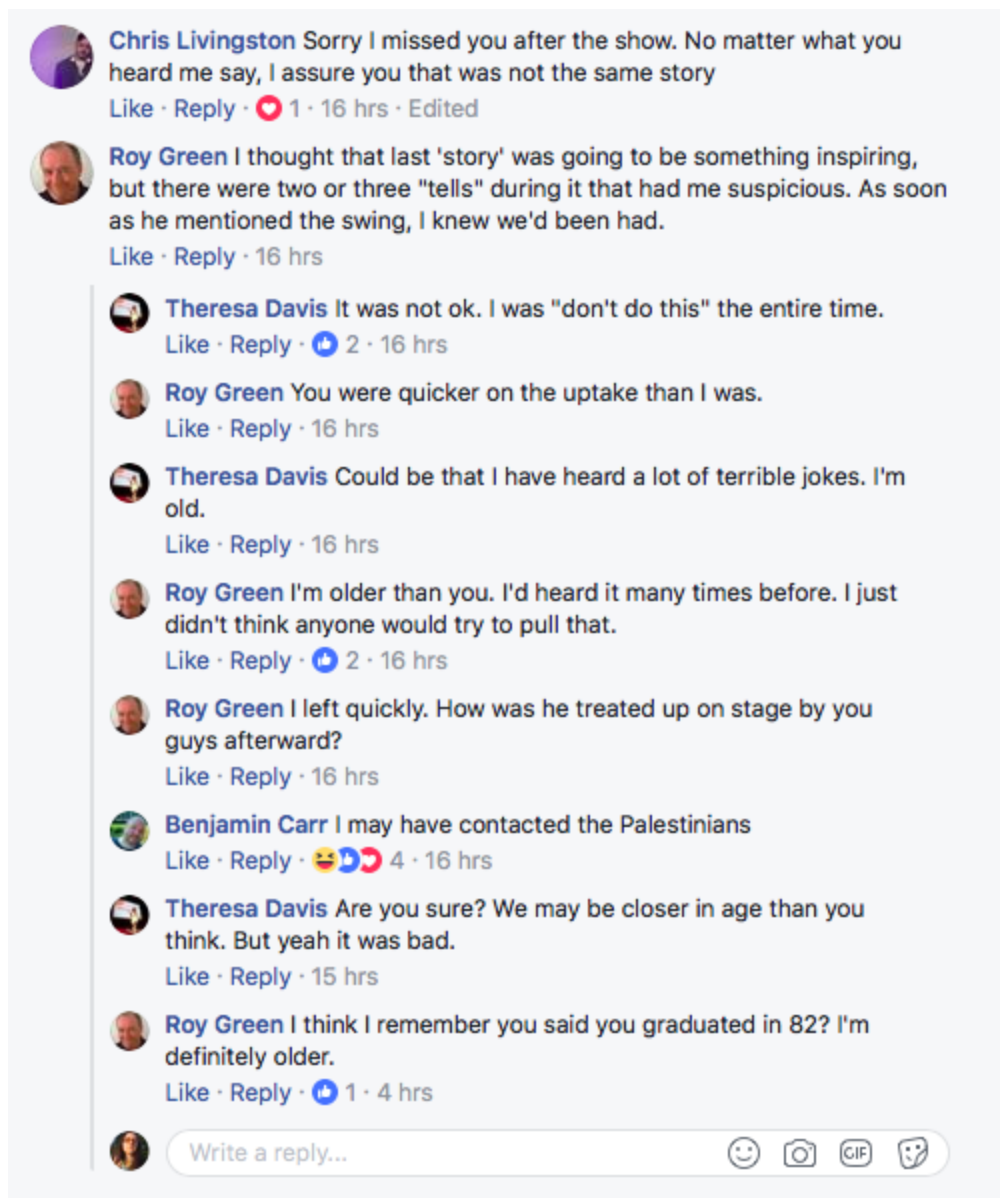


Figure 9. Comments on Carr's post about Matan

Roy Green and Theresa Davis are also regulars at both shows. Roy said that the audience had "been had" and Theresa was thinking "don't do this" during the story.

And even more discussion:

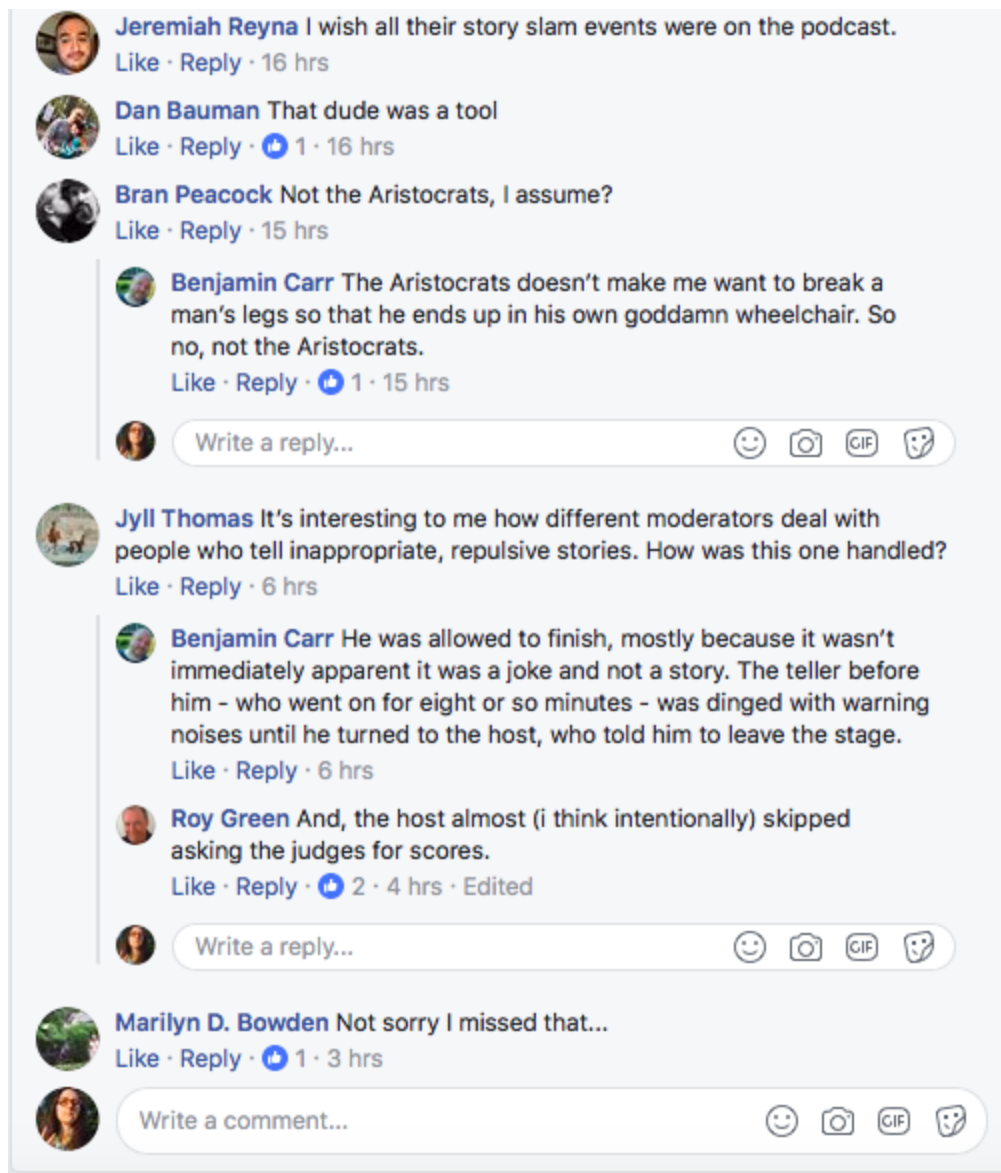


Figure 10. More comments on Carr's post about Matan

Again, Benjamin expressed a desire to do physical harm to the storyteller. More telling about the community, though, is his observation that Matan was allowed to finish "mostly because it wasn't immediately apparent it was a joke and not a story." Although what he shared was offensive and he broke multiple rules, where Matan really crossed a line was in not telling a story.

Members of the Carapace community consistently refer to Carapace as a “safe space.” Those present during Matan’s Moth “story” reacted like people who don’t feel safe: “don’t do this.” Perhaps it is possible to make people feel that uncomfortable while following all the rules, but it’s harder.

The hat.

Another part of the ritual of Carapace is the random selection of volunteers. Those who want to tell a story write their names on a slip of paper and drop it in the hat. Cris randomly draws names from the hat.

This hat almost has a life of its own. Lance Colley recalled picking out the top hat after the first MothUp show.

We were just looking for any kind of hat.
We wanted it to be
slightly
goofy but only slightly.
But still
we are all about it being relaxed and humorous but still
this is something that we were taking very seriously.
We were looking for a hat that was like just whimsical enough
to get people to come and smile and chuckle without being
something completely over the top ridiculous.
So we found the top hat in a
costume shop in Marietta and it was absolutely perfect.
It was just the right mix of everything.

He, Randy, and Joyce really thought about what the hat would say to Carapace attendees and felt that the top hat conveyed the right message.

Randy believes that the element of chance introduced by the hat is important because it mirrors real life.

About a third of the people who come up and put their name in the hat say
Well maybe I won't get picked
so I'll go in.
Because they're a little bit nervous about doing it
but they think
well but there's a chance that I won't have to.

People-
we all do that
in so many things in our lives.
Well
I guess I'll leave this door open
because I don't necessarily have to walk through it. (R. Osborne)

The possibility of not getting picked may make some people braver. They are willing to volunteer and leave their fate up to chance.

On a practical level, the hat was introduced to create a more equitable way to select storytellers. At that first MothUp, Lance said they had decided ahead of time that "if three people got up and told a story we'd be totally happy." They had more than three storytellers.

And we ended up filling up the whole hour and a half.
It was just person after person after-
there was a good 10 or 12 that very first night.

They had people putting their names on a list that first night. It was clear that at subsequent shows they were likely to have more storytellers than they could get to in 90 minutes. The hat was a way of randomly selecting storytellers. The hat determines who gets to tell a story if there are too many volunteers. The hat also determines the order of storytellers.

The organizers could have stuck with a list and had a "first come, first served" approach, but Randy said they had "a sort of instinct" that that wasn't the best way to do it.

Let's not do just raise your hand and tell a story.
No
too much like school
also
too predictable
also
you're in a way
biasing the event in favor of show-offs.

The hat makes it safer for people who are not show-offs to share their stories. Those who don't volunteer first are also worth hearing.

The randomness of the hat is also comfortable for the audience. David Russell, a regular Carapace attendee and storyteller called shows like Carapace "addictive."

because it's lightning in a bottle
depending on who gets chosen from the hat
you never know what you are going to get.
You might get
somebody who rambles and isn't that great
or you might get somebody telling a really
true beautiful personal story for the first time.

The audience doesn't want to hear the same ten people who show up early and volunteer every time. They want to hear some new people who have never told a story before.

Although the hat provides a relatively fair way to choose storytellers, the element of chance it introduces can also be anxiety inducing. Tellers don't know when, or even if, they will get chosen, so they have to be ready every time a new name is being drawn.

Well from my end
if they don't pick you out of the hat first
I have to suppress a small shot of adrenalin
every time Cris is winding up with the hat. (T. McGowan)

I have felt something similar while anticipating my own name being drawn. A hopeful storyteller can feel this way all night and not even get a chance to tell.

Those of us who volunteer know we aren't guaranteed to get chosen, but still don't like when it happens. From my field notes:

I misread the evening at the August Carapace and made this assumption that everyone would get to tell that night. I was a little disappointed each time a name was drawn and it wasn't mine, but not too much, because I was sure I would get to go. At the very end, when that turned out not to be the case, I was both bummed and a little relieved. I had been uncertain about my story that night because of the edits I had made to cut it down to 5 minutes. Even though, I believe, most storytellers are there both to tell and to listen, I think most of us are guilty of feeling a little dissatisfied when we put our name in and it isn't called.

Many storytellers (not all) prepare their story ahead of time. It is anticlimactic to put in that effort and then not get to perform.

The closing ritual is meant to help mitigate any disappointment. Cris invites the tellers whose names remain in the hat at the end of the night to all come to the stage and share a

"one-liner." The one-liner is supposed to be the "first, last, or best" line from the story. In this way, everyone who volunteered gets at least a moment of stage time.

One of the safeties the audience enjoys is that any of them can become storytellers. As Randy says, "The audience is the performers and the performers is the audience for this event." Part of the reason the audience is willing to endure stories they don't like without giving any negative response is that they can imagine themselves on that stage.

Cris described this:

If you don't like the story
or you don't like the storyteller just
let's be cool –
'cause you may be in that same position.
You want to get up and tell a story
and now there's that
you've kind of created that hostile environment
and that will make other people more reluctant
to tell stories
or even yourself if you're
Man now I have an idea for a story.
Oh man I don't want to get up there
since I was just booing someone.

Having an open hat makes audience members more willing to take the risk of hearing difficult (or just bad) stories. They can't give criticism from the audience, but they can take the stage and tell their own story. The equal opportunity nature of the hat, then, is important in preserving this idea that, truly, anybody can be a storyteller.

Lance used to call the hat a "fickle mistress." It is possible for hopeful tellers to attend month after month and not get chosen. The organizers recognized that this could be frustrating, especially to new attendees, and decided to take back a little control over who gets to tell. Will Young said that he was the reason they started the three strikes rule.

I did not get in for
the first three months
and I'm the reason why
there's a three strikes and you're in rule.

Because I kept coming
and after every show
that I didn't get called
ah Joyce would come up
and say you know
I'm so sorry!
I'm like
No no it's no big deal.
They're like
I'm putting you in this time!

When Will first came to Carapace he volunteered for three months without getting chosen. After that they created a "three strikes" rule. If you put your name in for three months and aren't picked, you are guaranteed to tell the next month.

The hat is meant to give everyone an equal chance. Any time the organizers mess with the hat, there is the potential for other volunteers to feel that their chances have been unfairly diminished. The three strikes rule is meant to create opportunities for the chronically unlucky; however, other circumventions of the hat also occur. At my last Carapace before I moved away from Atlanta in 2014 Joyce told me, "Of course, we'll make sure you tell tonight."

Ian Campbell suspects that Cris curates the show a bit:

I think the current host
maybe looks in the hat more than he really should
before he pulls out names
from a perspective of pure fairness that
you know the hat should be the one doing choosing.
But I think it also creates a better show.
He tends to mix and match the
tellers a little better.

The audience may benefit from some human choice as far as who tells and in what order, but that isn't really fair to the tellers.

The only shaping of the show that Cris admitted to me, was holding one of the longer-winded tellers until closer to the end. He said, "I can't have him right at the top." This sounds like he isn't determining *who* gets pulled out of the hat but does rearrange the order to protect the other tellers and audience when a teller is likely to go over time.

The host.

The host is an integral part of the ritual; opening and closing the show, and providing a brief interlude between tellers. As has already been illustrated, the host provides additional safety to storytellers by responding to negative audience comments, and by pre-empting heckling.

Cris Gray mentioned that at Venkman's there were often people in the "audience" who were not paying attention. (They weren't there for Carapace.) He tried to create a nicer performing environment for the storytellers by attempting to grab the attention of everyone in the room:

My goal was always
if somebody had their back to the stage
and they weren't paying attention
at some point I want them to turn around and be like
what's going on?
So that was always my
goal there was just
storytellers get up and then try and
entertain-
There are things from improv
commenting on the moment on what's happening in the room.
You know people are talking
people are talking
you can comment on it.
Not shaming those people but just like
comment on it and
maybe you say something funny that they're like
hey what's going on on stage?
Now they want to pay attention
to what's happening.
Yeah and I just want to set it up for the next storyteller to like
have
people to give them as much attention as possible.

Cris also makes storytellers welcome by asking the audience to applaud them all the way to the stage:

My other rule is when I call people up
I try to encourage everybody to applaud them

all the way up –
Just to add that encouragement and
like I said everybody's kind of a rock star tonight.

Cris's commentary between stories lets the storytellers know that they have been heard.

But then it's also one of those things too where
I feel like
because everybody basically just applauds
I feel like it also lets the storyteller know that
we were listening.

Much of what Cris does takes care of the storytellers. He helps them to feel safe and comfortable on the stage. This is a space he confidently enters and exits throughout the evening. He invites storytellers to join him on stage.

Amanda Roundtree pointed out that the host really takes care of everyone. He lays out the rules at the beginning of the night and facilitates most of the ritual. Cris also creates a bit more safety for the audience through his between-story comments.

and that even if you hear a story that's like
I'm somebody who's not prepared
or somebody who's super nervous
or somebody who
started telling a story
and then they felt like they didn't want to finish it
or that maybe they didn't know what the story was about
so they're kind of going around and around not getting to the point.
Even when that happens
if you have somebody
in a role of hosting or emceeing
who can kind of pick the energy back up
it's going to be fine. (A. Roundtree)

Cris can change the "energy" in the room if the audience is feeling a little unhappy or uncomfortable with the story that has just been told. Even though the stories and tellers may be unpredictable in this open mic event, Cris is a constant. He gives attendees confidence by taking some control over how the evening unfolds.

The People

The people at Manuel's.

Benjamin says "Carapace is a place where every voice belongs." I believe that they try to make everyone feel welcome so that every voice can be heard. However, the Carapace community is made up of people, who become part of the experience, and contribute to the feel of the evening. June Causey found it hard to walk into a room full of Carapace regulars:

I think it was just that they were
just very much in their own
thing
their own-
And I felt uncomfortable even walking in.

The people at Carapace feel safe, or not, for each other.

Highly educated, middle-aged, white people.

Terry Sarratt described the Carapace community as mostly "old hippies." Although many of my participants began with the assertion that Carapace is diverse, as we talked through who they regularly see there, the consensus was that the community is primarily middle-aged, white, and educated. This matches with my counts during some of my observations.

At the October 2017 show, I counted 61 attendees. There were 30 people in their 20s-40s (others were older), and 5 people of color. That show seemed to have unusually low attendance, so I counted again in November. From my field notes:

I counted 93 people, although I had a harder time keeping track as people arrived late. The way I was sitting I could see the main door, but people could also come in from the other side of the bar. I counted 13 people of color, so better representation than last month. I didn't try to count ages, as I think the numbers from last month show a pretty representative spread. I didn't count by gender either. It appears to be pretty equal. Other types of diversity, like sexual orientation, can't be easily identified unless I know the people personally. From my personal knowledge, Carapace has a handful of regulars (at least 5) who are LGB. I'm not aware of any current transgender regulars, but there was one years ago who has since passed away.

When Benjamin Carr first came to Carapace, he brought a friend who is African American. He was nervous for her as she took the stage to tell a story to a "room of mostly old

white people.” Eleanor Brownfield called the community “so pink.” This was something she thought would change over time as people brought diverse friends and made them feel welcome.

Eleanor appreciated the level of education that is typical of Carapace regulars:

Sarah Beth it’s kind of highfalutin to talk about
an intellectual community.

But it is.

There’s a level of
education in the room
that’s congenial. (E. Brownfield)

The age range of the Carapace community might be its most diverse characteristic.

About half the people in attendance tend to be 20-40 years old and the other half are 40 and up. Ian Campbell especially appreciates the

cross-generational atmosphere.

That’s one of the things I like best about it.

Is that so many of the other storytelling events in town
are for younger people
and are clearly
centered around that.

And by younger people I mean
millennial people.

Ian is in his 40s, so in the middle of the Carapace age range. Now, Frank and June Causey, who decided Carapace wasn’t for them, are in their 70s. They thought the Carapace audience was a little young and wouldn’t identify with their stories.

Liberals.

Regulars repeatedly mentioned to me the history of the venue:

It’s a very comfortable atmosphere to me.

Relaxed.

I love all the stuff on the walls

it’s historic

because it gives me a sense of my place in history
in this community

in this city. (M. R. Woo)

For Molly, the decorations make her feel connected to the local community and its history.

Part of the history of Manuel's is decidedly political. As Eleanor Brownfield put it:

for a long time Manuel's was the heart
of Democratic Party politics.
Everybody I knew went there.

This history was appealing to all of the Carapace regulars who brought it up. Ian Campbell called Manuel's a "safe space for free thought." He said this made it the perfect venue for Carapace which is "explicitly marketed as such as well" (a place for free thought).

Terri Sarratt called herself a "lifelong yellow dog Democrat." She said

it just
feels like that's
that's a place where my ideas
and the ideas that I hear from other people
are not going to be jarring to me
or to anybody else.

Manuel's is safe because certain ideas are particularly welcome there, and Terri agrees with those ideas. Most of those who attend Carapace seem to agree with those ideas as well.

However, I question whether more conservative Atlantans would feel as welcome.

Lance Colley was one of my first interviewees. He was a founder of Carapace and the original host but moved away from Atlanta several years ago. He said that in the early days, there was a regular who was very conservative and joked that the only thing that could get him into Manuel's was Carapace:

But he flat out would joke
that the whole building was filled with bleeding heart hippies
and blah blah blah.
But that was the only way he-
this is the only time I'll ever set foot in Manuel's
was to do Carapace.
I mean it was half joking

Just as others come to Manuel's in spite of the food and drink, this regular came in spite of the political history. I was unable to find this person to speak with, and it appears he no longer attends Carapace.

I asked the people I interviewed if they could recommend any conservative regulars to me. Terri Sarratt didn't think I would find any.

I would be surprised if you would
find people certainly
who came there regularly
who were conservatives?
I don't know
were I conservative
that I would feel
safe
comfortable there.
Even being there period
much less
telling my story.

Manuel's is a safe space for some kinds of stories, but maybe not for conservative stories.

Eleanor Brownfield gave some examples of stories told at Carapace that she didn't think conservatives would like.

I remember when
I hope this is not offensive
when I thought
every time your name was pulled from the hat
I was going to laugh my head off
and there would be something about breast milk.
All your stories
were at that point
in one way or another
related to what you were doing
in your mom life.
And it's
unlikely to me
that very many conservatives
would come back
more than once or twice
when your stories are
perfectly normal.
That's a topic
my perception of those people
tells me they would cringe.
When Terri Sarratt
talked about sex toys?
The right wing folks are not coming back
I don't think.

So it isn't just the politics
it's the whole world view.

The history of Manuel's sets the stage for liberals to feel most welcome there. Then, the stories that get told are more appealing to a liberal audience.

I reached out to Frank and June Causey because I had learned that they came to Carapace twice and didn't like it, and I know from some personal interactions with them that they are more conservative. They did object to the non "family friendly" nature of the stories at Carapace. They were willing to come to Manuel's, but once they got there, they didn't feel comfortable with the stories that were being told.

Tricia Stearns has worried that some people may not welcome her presence because they assume she is conservative.

I feel judged.
After the [2016] election
some people
fuming mad that
Hillary didn't win
and me being from the 'burbs.
And I didn't vote for him
I could swear to that.
But still I'm
white.
I'm from the 'burbs.
You know it was like
my car is going to get keyed.
I'm thinking
no I'm serious
people were that mad.

Even though she "didn't vote for him," Tricia thought there was some possibility of damage to her personal property over the strong political emotions happening after the election.

Tricia never made explicit to me during our conversation that she actually had conservative leanings, only that people would assume she did. However, in the following months, she ran for local office as a Republican candidate. I realized long after our interview that she probably was the conservative participant I had been looking for. She perhaps feared

my judgment just as she had feared the judgment of other Carapace regulars, and did not disclose her political views to me. Having a minority view point seems pretty uncomfortable for her.

Based on my conversations with Tricia, and Frank and June, the political leanings of those who feel most welcome in Carapace, absolutely shape the event. Individuals with more conservative views do not feel as comfortable there.

Adults.

The bar is also meant to be an adult place. From my field notes:

He [Cris] pointed out that we are in a bar and there will be adult themes. He did say that is what you would expect from a bar.

The bar helps to set audience expectations around what kinds of stories they are likely to hear.

It also helps storytellers feel comfortable to talk like adults, to adults.

There is some tension around making everyone feel truly welcome and inviting uncensored stories. It isn't actually possible to have it both ways. I watched Cris try to reconcile these two ideals at the July 2017 show. From my field notes:

He said this was a "safe space." He instructed the audience not to boo. Looking around the audience, he noticed a couple of children at tables. At least one of those tables had not come specifically for Carapace. They were just in the room when it started. Cris instructed the tellers to "be aware of the audience." But then he said that we do share adult themes at Carapace and don't censor people.

He kind of warned the parents that their kids might hear adult content, but also kind of warned the storytellers to be careful of what they shared.

The way this ended up playing out was that storytellers voluntarily censored any swearing in their stories, often telling the audience they were omitting or replacing a word. It was not apparent to me that adult themes were softened. Later in the evening Cris let the room know that the children were gone and we could "say whatever the fuck we wanted." Clearly storytellers couldn't actually say "whatever they wanted" while the children were there.

Random children in the audience are rarely an issue; however, there is a regular child attendee about whom the community has mixed feelings. Ian Campbell often brings his nine-year-old daughter to Carapace. I asked him about why he had first started bringing her. He said it was the only way he could come.

When I first started doing storytelling shows
my wife had this oddball work schedule
and she had just started at the firm she was at.
And they were having her work a kind of
late-ish shift.
So she was going into work at eleven o'clock
and not getting home until half past eight.
And this was five days a week.
I don't really like being stuck at home
so if I wanted to go out
I had to bring her with me.
So one of the first things that I started doing
was an Eye Drum thing called Writers' Exchange
which is very informal
and a small group.
And it was at the Goat Farm at the time.
So
I could bring my then
toddler-daughter
and rock her to sleep while I listened to other people tell stories.
And as time passed
she just became kind of a
pet at some of these.
I would bring her to Naked City
and she would get to hear swear words.
I can't bring her to Write Club
because it's in a [21 and up] bar.
And then Carapace was the perfect opportunity
because she could just sit there and eat grilled cheese and tater tots while
people told stories.

As a parent myself, I can relate to not wanting to be excluded from activities because I have to have a child with me. In fact, both of my kids went to Carapace with me a time or two when I was living in Atlanta. This happened when there was no one to watch them and bringing them was the only way I could go.

Ian understands that Carapace is for adults and does not want anyone to censor their stories because his daughter is there. He sometimes assures people, “she’s heard worse.” At the July show, right after Cris announced that all the children had left the audience, he called Ian up as the next teller. Before launching into his story, Ian mentioned that his own child had told a story at Carapace the previous month, and that she had recently told him that “Dolores Umbridge is a mother-fucking bitch.” He seemed to be illustrating his claim that storytellers did not need to censor themselves in front of his daughter, because she’s already heard it all. They shouldn’t feel less safe because she is there. Also, she is a Carapace storyteller. She is one of them.

At the September 2017 show, I heard Ian’s daughter tell her second Carapace story. I watched her reshape the stage space, which is clearly inadequate for a child storyteller. She moved a chair into the center of the stage and stood on it to tell her story. With no elevated stage, the thing that makes storytellers more visible is that they are standing while the audience is sitting. However, she is a child and is not much taller than a sitting adult. She altered the stage to make it work better for her.

Ian’s daughter was also very uncomfortable with the microphone and kept holding it too far from her face. Cris (the host) ended up standing right next to her during her entire story to help with the mic, and possibly out of some worry that she might fall off the chair.

In my interviews, I heard Carapace attendees react very differently to their resident child storyteller. Benjamin Carr, with whom I spoke immediately after the September show, thought her telling a story and having Cris right beside her was beautiful, and a testament to the best of what Carapace can be.

Tonight
you have E.
E needed help holding the microphone.
Cris was there.

Physically.

Like literally someone will reach out and help you if you need.

Other audience members, who are willing to endure stories they don't like from adult storytellers, don't feel the same way about a child teller.

And not to be unkind but
I'm not generous enough
when there are five to eight people still in the hat
who are not gonna tell.
I'm not generous enough
to sit there and hear her prattle on
about her day at school.

She is taking away time from other potential storytellers. There is an implication here that because this is an event for adults, it is more important that the adult storytellers get a chance to tell.

Another regular objected to Ian's daughter being at Carapace at all.

The only thing I haven't liked is
a child has
gotten up to tell a story
and I did not
think that was
appropriate.
I didn't even think it was appropriate really
for her to be here.
She was young and
it's like
very much
to me this is like
this is an adult
activity.

Ian tries to make the storytellers feel safe in spite of the fact that there is a child in the audience, by saying they don't need to censor themselves. He also suggests that this is a safe environment for his daughter because she is not upset by what she is hearing. However, whether or not she is actually safe is clearly part of the tension. Some attendees disagree with Ian's assessment and still think it is inappropriate for his daughter to be in a bar listening to adult stories.

There are other ways in which she may not be safe, though. The stage is not child-friendly, and there was even some slight danger of physical harm had she fallen off the chair. She was very nervous while performing. It is one thing to be allowed to overhear adult stories. It is something else to be the only child telling a story to a room full of adults. An essential piece to the safety of Carapace is that *anyone can tell*. However, it is much harder for a child to be a storyteller at Carapace.

There are some boundaries to the community, and this becomes more apparent when someone who isn't meant to be there tries to participate. The event is designed for adults. The stage is designed for adults. The safeties that exist for the intended adult community start to fall apart for children.

Cris's difficulty balancing the safety of children in the audience and the safety of the storytellers suggests that the community itself hasn't totally accepted, themselves, that they have boundaries. Not everyone can be a part of Carapace.

If Ian's daughter and possibly other children become more integrated community members then Carapace will become something else. There will still be people excluded. They will just be different people.

Friends and Frenemies.

People make friends through Carapace. David Russell moved to Atlanta from out of state, and coming to Carapace is how he started meeting new people and making friends. People from this community continue to be some of his closest friends.

I saw this
and I gave it a try.
And I've met all
pretty much all of my closest friends
through either storytelling here
or getting other opportunities to host shows
and do other things in the arts in Atlanta community
based on this show. (David Russell)

Friendships form as attendees talk to each other about their stories after the show. They also start forming as the tables fill up and latecomers are seated with strangers (who are potential new friends!).

Because of overlap between other communities and social groups, there are also attendees who come to Carapace and find they already have friends there. I first attended because a friend of mine, Shannon McNeal, from Southern Order of Storytellers, had been talking about Carapace. I was quite intimidated to go to an event like Carapace on my own the first night and tried to make sure I could share a table with Shannon.

Benjamin Carr was pleasantly surprised to find people he already knew in the audience when he first came to Carapace.

When I was here
for the first time
and I saw that you were here
and that was also the same night that you invited
Will [Young] to come here
and I realized
Okay
I'm among Phi Kappa people
we're gonna be fine.

Benjamin, Will, and I all belonged to the same literary society (Phi Kappa) at the University of Georgia, although I actually attended a few years after they did. Other Phi Kappans have also attended Carapace on and off over the years. Benjamin trusts that members of Phi Kappa are good people and found it encouraging that Carapace seemed like a comfortable place for Phi Kappa alumni. This was also a signal to Benjamin that the people at Carapace were like him.

As a side note, since the HOPE scholarship, a GPA-based scholarship funded by the Georgia lottery, motivates so many undergraduate students to stay in-state, a large part of UGA's student body comes from metro Atlanta. Many of these students move back to the

Atlanta area after graduation. There are more Phi Kappa alumni in Atlanta than there are in Athens (where UGA is located). And, it does make sense that those who participated in debate and oration in college would later attend events like Carapace.

New and old friends add to the general feeling of safety for Carapace attendees. That fear I had of walking into Carapace my first time quickly disappeared. After a few months I wasn't worried about who I would sit with. I could join a table with friends, or get there early, start a table, and watch it fill up.

The friendships, and the comfort of those friendships, also extend outside of Carapace. At the August 2017 show, Will Young told a story about his brother being in a motorcycle accident:

Will talked about pain and an anecdote from a book about Peter the Great. Peter was torturing a guy and he wouldn't crack. When asked how he could stand it he said he was in a torture club. Peter offered him property if he told what he wanted to know and the guy said "the only torture they never prepared me for was kindness." From there Will went on to talk about his brother being in an accident recently and breaking both wrists.

The brother was fortunate that a hand surgeon was on duty and the Facebook peoples were saying it was "god's work." Will was frustrated that it was a drunk driving motorcycle accident, like maybe his brother didn't deserve god's work. His brother later texted his mother at midnight asking for coffee. Will brought him coffee the next day, which he no longer wanted. He was especially irritated his brother woke their mother up because she was having health problems and was always taking care of everyone else. Will thought all the people on Facebook were like the kindness torture.

A few days after telling this story at Carapace, Will posted this link on Facebook:

<http://www.lettersofnote.com/p/light-has-gone-out-of-my-life.html?m=1>. It is a page from a site called "Letters of Note," and describes how Theodore Roosevelt lost his wife and mother within hours of one another. His diary entry for that day says, "The light has gone out of my life." My mother saw this before I did and told me she thought Will's mother had died. When I saw it later, I came to the same conclusion. At least 8 Carapace friends commented on Will's post (including me) out of a total of 97 comments. One comment from David Russell said, "So

sorry, Will. Let me know if you need anything.” Carapace attendees offer each other comfort outside of the monthly show through friendships that extend to Facebook and even the real world.

Of course, it would be disingenuous for me to imply that everyone at Carapace gets along with everyone else. There is no community like that.

It's interesting because there are
factions of people
within these groups
that I don't think it's possible to
be in a group of people without
hurting each other at some point
finding people you do like more than others. (Shannon Turner)

There are subgroups, and there are people who just don't like each other. Tricia Stearns said she has noticed people taking little digs at one another:

You can pick up when people dig each other
make a little dig here and there.
Not all the time.
Just every once in a while.

Benjamin Carr freely admits that he passes notes and does “snarky eye rolls.”

One participant told me about having a real falling out with another regular:

Kinda like going to church
and then when you go to church
it's so nice.
You just love it.
This is so nice.
It's kinda like you're real enthusiastic.
Then you get on some committee.
And then somebody's really bitchy
who really you thought was
a nice person
and they end up
not being a nice person.
They're in there
and they're on the board of everything.
They are a matriarch of the church.
And you're like
huh.
And that person besides

they don't like you.
Then you're like
Gosh.
Maybe I don't have time to go to that brunch after all.

This conflict has made this participant less enthusiastic about Carapace.

Little digs and eyerolls, people may not notice, and the crowd is big enough that attendees can usually avoid others they would rather not sit with. However, when attendees really hurt each other (emotionally, psychologically) they have trouble being in the same room.

Telling and listening to stories.

Once individuals are at Carapace they may also grow to feel more (or less) safe through their roles as storytellers and audience members. The stories told and heard impact the comfort of attendees.

The storytellers.

Storytelling is just an enjoyable experience for many people. I wrote in my field notes how good it felt to get a lot of laughter during one of my stories:

I was kind of surprised by the amount of laughter I heard and how much people really seemed to like the story. It felt really good. Powerful - like they were feeding me.

Public speaking isn't for everyone, but for some people it is fun and even empowering.

Amanda Rountree told me

I'm a performer so
I love being the center of attention
if I'm doing something right

June Causey, who loves storytelling, but decided Carapace was not for her, sees
performing as a confidence boost

It can boost your
self-confidence.
Every time you speak
you know
you feel a little more comfortable
speaking before a group.
Kind of like Toastmasters.

Toastmasters
makes you put your foot out there.
And you find out you can do it.
And the same thing with storytelling.
And that people can be interested in the things that you
tell.

It feels good to see that people are interested in what you have to say. Public speaking can be scary at first, but once you try it, you realize people really do want to hear you.

For the storytellers, telling their stories can be therapeutic. David Russell described it as “a cathartic experience.” Ian Campbell said his wife shared a story at Carapace about her verbally abusive father and it “enabled her to make a lot of sense out of things that hadn’t made sense at the time.” As Amanda Roundtree put it, “Telling the story is dealing with it.” It is part of the process of understanding life events.

At the October 2017 show Will Young told a very raw story about his brother getting into a drunk driving motorcycle accident. He told me that telling the story felt “indulgent.” He knew he hadn’t fully processed the event, which had happened only days before the show. He was possibly imposing on the audience a bit by telling this not fully processed story. But it was still a good experience for him, and the audience did indulge him.

Not long after the motorcycle accident, Will’s mother died. He told the story of her death at the December Carapace.

I don’t know it felt like
something that
I had to tell.
And it felt like
I was sort of
doing my therapy homework.
I had been expressly told to
tell the story
or write it down.
And even if I’d already done that
to do it again
and again.

Telling this story was literally part of a therapy assignment.

Mostly when people talked about telling stories as being therapeutic, they were specifically referring to difficult stories - stories about bad or upsetting things that had happened to them. Tricia Stearns found telling happy stories therapeutic. She first came to Carapace while she was still grieving the death of her adult daughter. That wasn't the story she told, though. She told a funny story. She realized, in the middle of her story, "Oh, you're laughing." Coming to Carapace, for Tricia, was

entering back into the human existence
through storytelling.
It made me realize
I was not dead.
I was not done.
Because I felt done.

She liked that "I didn't have to share anything I didn't want to share." Carapace is a safe space for storytellers to be vulnerable. However, there is also safety in the fact that they don't have to be vulnerable.

Storytellers are, occasionally, too vulnerable, which ends up not being a safe experience for them. Joyce Mitchell, one of the organizers, prefers to listen, but early on, Lance and Randy urged her to tell a story, at least once.

I've only told one story.
It's a story that I would never tell anyone.
Never tell my parents.
And I did it.
I can't say
I'm so healed from it.
In fact I
was very uncomfortable about it
for a long while.

Tricia did end up telling the story of her daughter's death at a Carapace-related event put together by Randy. That night, she was deciding between two stories she might tell and ended up feeling that the other story was too light after what other storytellers had shared.

I had not practiced it.
I was not ready for prime time

and I felt I'd vomited
emotionally vomited
on the audience.
I had a real bad vulnerability hangover
after that story.
I did not go to Carapace for
two to three four months.
I was busy and
I was just like-
I just stripped in front of you all.
And not in a good way.

Tricia had shown too much of herself to the Carapace community and needed some space before she felt comfortable coming around again.

Telling stories is enjoyable for the storytellers and can even be therapeutic. They can feel comfortable and safe being very vulnerable. However, they can also go too vulnerable and enter some unsafe, definitely uncomfortable territory.

The audience.

The stories are enjoyable for the audience as well. Although they understand they may hear some bad or uncomfortable stories, they certainly wouldn't sit through a whole show of them. For the most part they take comfort in what they are hearing.

Just as telling very personal or difficult stories can be therapeutic for the storytellers, hearing these stories can be therapeutic for listeners.

As Lance so eloquently put it, audience members relate to the life struggles being revealed

and all of a sudden you realize
damn, I'm not as crazy as I thought I was
when you start hearing some of the stories people share.

When Roy tells new friends about Carapace, he says:

I like to go to this thing
called Carapace and
pretty much
it's my therapy.
It just allows me to

unwind
and listen to somebody else's
troubles or
funny stories or
something like that. (R. Green)

Hearing difficult stories can also make audience members glad that their lives aren't that bad.

I guess, to some degree
it makes me come back home and say:
Oh!
I love it here.
I want to be with these people
that are already alive
they're still alive
while they're alive
while I'm alive
while I have good health
when I didn't get threatened
when nobody is pointing a gun to my head
and I didn't get raped today.
This is great.
My life is lovely!
Let me enjoy it. (M. R. Woo)

The audience also just enjoys the stories because they are funny, entertaining, or interesting.

When I hear these stories
that's kind of an extension.
It's the newspaper of the day
for me I mean.
We usually
read the newspaper for news.
No one reads newspapers anymore do they?
But
for me it's kind of like
what's happening in the city.
And here I'm hearing it from everybody's point of view.
And what's happening psychologically.
Psychically I guess you'd say. (M. R. Woo)

Or, as Terri Sarratt very simply put it, "I like listening to the stories."

There is also safety in living vicariously through the storyteller. Molly enjoys hearing stories where things went wrong and appreciates that she didn't have to live through that herself.

I like
surprising
hearing guys talking about
going on adventures in Europe
and it just totally screws up you know
and it's funny.
I get to go on an adventure without having to
suffer all the consequences.
Or relationships that totally blow up. It's –
how nice to
be intimately involved and not get hurt!
You know.
It's vicarious.
But this is how we learn.

Of course, there are also stories the listeners don't enjoy hearing. Some of these are when the storyteller is too vulnerable for the listener's taste. Eleanor Brownfield described a story that felt too intimate to her:

A young woman of size
was telling
her self-doubts
in a way that made me very uncomfortable.
Like if I ran into her on the bus the next day
I wouldn't want to meet her eyes.
So I
kind of studied the salt shaker
until she was through.
It was too intimate.

Eleanor felt like she knew private things about this woman that would make her feel embarrassed to interact with her in the outside world.

Molly also shared that too much intimacy from the storyteller can make her uncomfortable.

And sometimes I feel that way
when there's a really intimate story that I'm almost like
I don't know where to look.

Damn that's so intimate it's-
I almost feel like I'm revealing myself
and I don't want to.

It is like the storyteller has done something to Molly. The storyteller is being vulnerable, and it makes Molly feel vulnerable, too, and it's uncomfortable.

June Causey, probably reacting to some of these intimate, or even sexual stories, said "seemed like they were kind of trying to shock each other." The shocking nature of the stories stood out to her more than the possible value of them. She said:

I had some pictures in my mind
that were not necessarily
what I would have wanted to walk away with.
And it
seemed to me like
a competition.
A competition of
who could make me feel the worst.

Roy Green differentiated between being truly uncomfortable and just cringing a bit.

I don't think I have [been uncomfortable].
Maybe there have been cringe-worthy moments.
I think maybe when you were
talking about those
Diva Cups
I was going ah eeee.
But not
uncomfortable like
maybe if somebody was
talking about the time they
murdered somebody.
That might make me uncomfortable.

Hearing a story about menstrual cups makes Roy cringe, but he doesn't really mind listening to it. Roy suggested that a story of murder would make him uncomfortable. Not only would that be something he didn't want to hear about, he might feel a real physical sense of danger, being in the same room as a murderer. That is discomfort!

The audience wants the storyteller to succeed in telling a good story. Watching the storyteller struggle instead can be uncomfortable.

Okay maybe
just watching someone
who was
clearly struggling
not so much
with the material
but just
got stage fright.
That kind of thing.
I could see myself
being uncomfortable with that. (R. Green)

Carapace is meant to be a platform for the average person, which means that many of those who tell stories are not practiced performers or public speakers. There are people who struggle. The, generally kind, members of the audience at Carapace aren't upset that the storyteller is doing a bad job. They get uncomfortable because they feel the discomfort of the storyteller.

That said, audience members do sometimes feel uncomfortable because they are having to sit through a bad story or performance. Roy objected to a semi-regular teller who

used to always
preface their stories
with
how do I say
promotion of their
activities.
And you go
okay
we know this.
Everything that they talk about is about this one
thing.
And it's great
if it's one time.
But when every story they tell is
around that
you kind of say
You got a life?
Something else?

Audience members get tired of hearing the same stories from the same people, and more so when the storytellers use Carapace as a platform to advertise for their causes.

Will Young pointed out that with many drinking stories

You had to be there.
Or you have to know these people.
Like well I don't!

Some stories are more amusing to the storytellers than they are to the audience.

Renée Kirlin just doesn't like some of the storytellers.

Okay there are a couple of guys
who tell stories here
on a regular basis and
I'm not a fan of theirs you know?
They just
seem sort of full of themselves.

Being a little uncomfortable isn't always a bad thing. At the August 2017 show, Cris, the host, told a story that clearly made many audience members temporarily uncomfortable because they thought he was going to be funny, and then he got serious. From my field notes:

Cris moved the mic stand to the side and held the mic. His story was about not knowing a person's history. He started by talking about officer candidate school where the candidates had to remove any marks of rank and only put them back on at graduation. Some people talked about where they came from (army, navy) and their rank, but one guy didn't. That guy had the most ribbons and wore a green beret at graduation and no one really knew his history during the training. Cris said his former fiancé didn't know his history. He talked about hidden "ribbons" of committing forgery and using drug money to pay for college. The audience laughed at these comments. The forgery seemed like it could be funny, because he said he was 9 at the time. But I got from his attitude where this was going. Cris is normally a funny guy and it seemed like the audience didn't want to let go of that and let him be serious. He had to be joking when he was talking about these crimes. At a dance club one night, after some drinking, the fiancé and a friend proposed a three-some. He agreed and they ended up shocked by his behavior. He had clearly done that before and they thought they were mostly going to put on a cute show of kissing each other - playing in the shallow end. He said he "drug them into deep water." He finished by saying the relationship didn't last long after that and you don't always know a person's past.

Cris wasn't just talking about his ex-fiancé not knowing things about him. The Carapace community, to whom he is so familiar as a host, didn't know these things about him.

I talked to David Russell after the show that night and he brought up Cris's story:

So I feel like people
first time coming

to live storytelling
they're probably wanting to laugh
and be supportive in that way.
But I think
they're surprised to find
how real people are,
and how they're willing to
share more
way intimate details than they're possibly
thinking that they will
be able to listen to. Like I mean
Cris tonight talking about having an ex-fiancé
and the three-ways
and everything like that
like people here probably did not expect to hear that from him
or even like know him at all before he told that story
which is a great example of just
you don't know what you are going to get until you come.

People want to laugh. They like laughing. They may not realize that they could enjoy hearing intimate or difficult stories, but then they do.

I was uncomfortable for Cris, hearing the audience laugh when I knew he wasn't trying to be funny. I got the chance to talk to him about this story the next month. He had definitely noticed the audience's hesitation to go with him, but it didn't bother him as much as it bothered me.

You can feel that sometimes in
stand-up and improv
people are along and they're like
Oh this is going to be funny!
They had that expectation
and then when you change
you can feel the pull back
because it is a change from what they were expecting.
People are like
this is going to be funny!
and then
now he's turning dark.
And so they're like
I didn't sign up for this!
Wait! Wait!

He saw the audience's discomfort with the story being something different from what they were expecting.

In a comedy setting, Cris feels more obligated to keep things light and funny for the audience and might react to their discomfort by easing up on the more serious material. At Carapace he wants to sit in the discomfort.

With a storytelling show I'm like
Uh let's stay in this for a second!
I feel you pulling back.
I feel the nervous laughter
kind of like ha ha
to break the tension.
But I want to sit here for a second.
It's just a little bit of experimentation where
I can feel it-
I'm feeling a little uncomfortable
so I know the audience as a group as an organism-
I can feel that we're both feeling uncomfortable.
Let's sit in this for a minute.
Let's just be uncomfortable.

This is part of what Carapace is about. Audience members don't just endure the uncomfortable stories for the sake of the comfortable ones. Being uncomfortable together in those moments of messy honesty is what people come to Carapace for.

CHAPTER 5: THE MESSAGE

There are several messages at Carapace. Some of these messages come from the organizers as they shape the event and try to attract an audience and volunteer storytellers. Other messages are common themes that pop up in the stories told.

You are a Storyteller / You Have a Story to Tell

The show is entirely made up of volunteer storytellers, so understandably, the organizers want to make ordinary people believe that they are storytellers, and that they have stories to tell.

Randy Osborne, one of the organizers, thought it was encouraging that when he told a story at one of the early shows, he didn't put on a great performance:

It helped I think that I had zero experience.
Because I was awkward sweaty stumbled and lost my way and forgot things.
It actually helped other people get the courage to go to the microphone
because they saw
how poorly it's possible to do and not die.
[laughing]
You just sit down and the next person comes up.

He demonstrated that anyone could be a storyteller, and that even if you are a bit awkward, you'll survive.

It works. Ordinary people are convinced to come up and tell stories. It works so well that some of them get more serious about it. They perform in other shows, sign up for improv classes, and even go professional. Shannon Turner, a long time regular who has become a storytelling coach in the last couple years told me:

It [storytelling] was always there in the background
but I never really saw it as a professional
career track until I got here.

She was interested in storytelling, but Carapace made her believe it could be her career.

Of course, being willing to tell a story isn't quite enough. People have to have a story to tell. Coming up with a personal story can be intimidating. Even with a lifetime of material, it's easy to draw a blank. Primarily through the themes and Randy Osborne's detailed prompts, the organizers help potential tellers think of stories.

This works, too. When I first came to Carapace the themes helped me think of personal stories when I thought I had none (or very few) to tell. Tricia Stearns knows that she has stories, and the themes help her find them:

I live a story every day.
I'm wondering
do enough people realize
that I think that's what fun about the themes
because it makes you think.

Carapace tells ordinary people: You are a storyteller. You have stories to tell.

You Are Safe Here

As has been covered thoroughly in the section on Carapace as a Safe Space, one message the organizers try hard to suggest is "You are safe here." This message is in the venue, and the rules and ritual. This message, like "You are a storyteller" is necessary for the show to exist. As Lance Colley, original host, pointed out:

Public speaking
is the biggest fear of most adults in America.
You look at this and
you're asking people to stand up in front of other people
voluntarily and speak.
The idea that was
would be terrifying to a lot of people.
From the beginning we
did not want any competitive aspect to it.
We wanted it to be
a very safe environment
a very nurturing environment that people actually did feel comfortable enough
to stand up and start volunteering their stories.

It's not enough for attendees to have a story to tell. They have to be willing to tell it. They have to feel safe to tell it, in spite of a widespread fear of public speaking.

This is the Truth

Carapace is advertised as being true, personal storytelling. The organizers encourage true stories, and the audience more or less expects them. As discussed in the section on True and Personal stories, Carapace attendees have different interpretations of "truth," especially as it relates to facts.

Participants also spoke about a different kind of truth. The storyteller could be genuine, authentic, real. S/he could display a moment of vulnerability on stage that would make the audience believe that they were hearing something true.

Randy associated less performative storytelling with truth:

We still get the stutterers
and stammerers
and sweaty people.
And those are-
I love those
because it brings that authenticity to the event.

Being awkward on stage indicates authenticity. Presumably stammering and sweating is not part of an intentional performance (although it could be), and because the storyteller is not "performing" s/he is being authentic.

Lance Colley shared this view, that if it was less of a performance it was more authentic.

He said:

And that was one thing we did not want.
We didn't want
performances.
We wanted people to be genuine.
So
one of the things was
keeping that genuine feel.

Lance went on to say that when tellers were being genuine “all of a sudden you got that glimpse of who they really were.” It is not just that they were sharing something true, they were exposing their true selves.

True stories are expected because of the nature of the event. However, through moments of vulnerability tellers let listeners know, “This is true.”

Change Happens

Turning to the stories, most if not all, involve change. Perhaps this is simply because change is an important element of a good story. Shannon Turner observed:

I do think that
one thing that this
audience seems to really crave
is stories that ultimately are about change.
I think that the old Aristotelian
format of like the
rising action climax and falling action
but really if you put the third leg back on that
and turn it into the Delta sign
that there needs to be some kind of
ultimate change in the person
and that's the story that
will be really successful.

Shannon describes this like a story coach. Someone constructing a story might want to ask themselves whether they've included rising action, climax, falling action, and change. It is a story formula.

Randy Osborne suggested that the little everyday events that really bring about change in our lives are the events that make the best stories.

The things that really steer
your
course through the world
change the way you view think and act
are the things that happen
every day.
Good fiction is made of that.
Good true stories

are made of that.

This is where stories come from: change. And change is happening all the time.

Good and bad are intermingled (fortunately/unfortunately).

Carapace. Atlanta. July, 2017. Theme: Sour Grapes

He said he had three sour grapes. He was a chemistry major. Physics class made him feel stupid. He failed the first time but took it again and passed the second time. He thought he could get a job easily with a chemistry degree in Atlanta, but couldn't find a job. He worked for a furniture store for a while. Recently, he finally got a chemistry job. Unfortunately, his new job conflicted with Carapace, so he wasn't able to come for a while. But now he's here!

The fortunately/unfortunately format comes from folklore, and I was surprised to hear a story like this at Carapace. It doesn't happen often. Rather than making a neat delta, as described by Shannon Turner, with change closing the triangle, changing circumstances repeatedly flip the story back and forth, so that the listener is uncertain whether there will be a happy or sad ending. The point of the story could be interpreted as: change is constant. Perhaps the internal change that the teller undergoes is an acceptance of change.

I learned a life lesson.

Carapace. Atlanta. November, 2017. Theme: In the Dark

Jack Walsh made some comment about Buck Rogers [referring back to an earlier story]. Then he went into his story. In Genesis, Lot's wife looked back in the dark [he said "check" like he checked off getting the theme] and was punished by being turned into a pillar of salt. Jack got off easier. He took his daughter to day camp, had to go back for her backpack, and after dropping it off decided to go to the mall. He got "seduced" by an Israeli dead sea skin salt saleswoman at a kiosk. When he imitated her talking to him he sounded Russian. He said that isn't what she sounded like, but he can't do Israeli. She encouraged him to get the skin product for his wife. While rubbing salt scrub into his hand, she asked if he had ever heard of the Dead Sea. He said he had been there and she asked if he floated. She asked if he knew why it was called the Dead Sea, and he did. She said he was so smart! He looked down and his thumbnail was really shiny from buffing. He said something about "it's not rocket surgery" which is a joke I recognized from Vlog Brothers. He got in another "in the dark - check." He told the woman his wife would like it. She immediately went to lure in another customer while another guy rang him up. When he saw the next guy with her he wasn't sure if he wanted to say "run" or "she's mine." There is a salt formation near the Dead Sea called

"Lot's Wife" which reminds people of what happens when you make regrettable decisions. The product he bought sits unused on his wife's dresser as a reminder to him.

As Cris Gray, the current host put it, often:

they tell the story
and then it sums up with
and what I learned from that was...

Through experience, and usually, mistakes, the teller has become wiser. They'll never do that again.

Ending a personal story can be difficult. It can be the most difficult part of the story. Without a good wrap-up, the event is just an anecdote you might share with your family over dinner: "I got sucked into a kiosk and bought some dead sea salt scrub I don't need." The "lesson learned" ending creates closure and illustrates that the teller has changed.

Although I doubt that the tellers honestly believe audience members will learn from their mistakes, this could be the most "information sharing" of the story types. It is possible an audience member could give the mall kiosk a wider berth after hearing Jack's story, or realize the pretty girl is trying to sell something and her flattery is fake.

Storytelling has long been used to teach lessons. Aesop's fables contain explicit morals and many fairy tales clearly teach of potential dangers. (e.g. Little Red Riding Hood: don't talk to strangers.) It is natural for us to look for morals in our own stories and to wish to share them.

I changed my perspective.

Carapace. Atlanta. July, 2017. Theme: Sour Grapes

Laura Locke's story was about another mother in the neighborhood. After her son moved out the woman decided to work on losing weight and was doing this by treading water in her pool. She would have her friends, including Laura, come join her to keep her company. Some of the other women were really into looking up their ancestry and this woman said she had done that and had been horrified to find out there were so many Jews in her family. The audience was looking attentive. They laughed and applauded at this. Laura asked what was wrong with having Jews in your family. Laura

tried to argue but realized no one else was offended by this and she was “the turd in the pool” ruining it for everyone else.

The stories of learning a life lesson often end with the teller behaving differently. (e.g. “I’ll never do that again!”) There are also stories in which the teller undergoes a change which is much more internal. Their experience changes the way they think.

The change may be positive and enlightening, or, as in Laura’s experience a disturbing revelation. Within this category of perspective changing stories, are stories in which the tellers reframe a negative experience as positive. What first seemed tragic, can be viewed as beautiful, or funny.

I found beauty in tragedy.

Carapace. Atlanta. July, 2017. Theme: Sour Grapes

Stacey Beth had worked for an assisted living home. There was a nosy guy (resident) who always got the mail for everyone and looked at it. He got embarrassed by a catalog on “senior sex aids” that Stacey Beth had ordered. Then Stacey Beth said the sour grapes part of the story came when her boss started sleeping at her desk. The board sent in a “consultant” who was really a snitch to the board. Everyone was fired by the board. Stacey Beth said that she hadn’t had the courage to leave that job but is living her dream since she got fired. She ended, as always, by saying “thanks y’all.” (July Carapace)

Tellers choose to interpret a difficult or even tragic situation as beautiful. Stacey Beth was fired but ended up shifting into another career she enjoys more. (Stacey Beth is currently a yoga instructor.)

I found comedy in tragedy.

Carapace. Atlanta. October, 2017. Theme: Left Behind

Anthony Elmore was the first storyteller. He talked about reading Revelation as a child and collecting Jack Chick tracts. He learned all about the post-rapture animals. One morning he went to his parents’ room and they were gone, but their bed was unmade. His mother’s gown was on the bed. He looked all over the house and couldn’t find his parents. Their cars were in the driveway. He circled around the house and couldn’t find them. He finally concluded that they had been “raptured.” He was left behind. He knew that the beast would come and there would be 7 years of tribulation. But as a kid he wouldn’t be expected to pay for the house. He just had to survive. He went back in and his parents were there. He started confessing all the bad things he had done, like saying

the Lord's Prayer in a Donald Duck voice. He wanted to make sure that whenever the rapture actually happened, he wouldn't be left behind. He would still peek in his parents' room in the mornings to make sure they were there.

Early on, when I was trying to categorize the stories, I thought that finding comedy in tragedy, was a kind of finding beauty. As I heard more and more stories, I decided to separate comedy and beauty. This is partly because there are a good number of stories that turn difficult situations into humor. It is also because laughter releases tension and is a natural reaction to discomfort. Finding beauty in tragedy may require a higher level of acceptance.

When Anthony thought his parents had been raptured and he had been left behind, that was clearly pretty traumatic for him. The experience stuck with him and he continued to be fearful that it would happen for real, so he checked his parents' room every morning. There isn't really a positive outcome from all of this. There isn't beauty in the same way as in Stacey Beth's story. Anthony's story is funny. We laugh at his misunderstanding.

At the same time, Anthony laughs about this now *because* it was uncomfortable. Maybe we laugh because we remember a time our parents weren't there (if not through rapture, the time we got lost in the mall, or our parents were super late picking us up from practice). We remember that discomfort and laugh it off.

I think I am great at X, but a thing happened that suggests otherwise (ironic)

Carapace. Atlanta. January, 2018. Theme: Turn Around

Kumar was a grad student at Georgia State University, studying cults. He was in the quad for a racial justice event. A guy started talking to him about neural plasticity. Then he invited Kumar to a party in Atlanta with rappers who wanted to give back to the community, and asked for a ride. They drove to a gated community in Kennesaw. At the party everyone was hyper. There were lots of attractive women, but no overt flirting. After a while, they all sat down and watched a promo on the TV. It was a pitch to sell a product. Kumar realized it was a commercial cult recruitment. He was offended they would try to recruit him and upset he didn't realize sooner. The next day he saw the same guy on the quad again and told him he was in a cult.

There were a few stories that were kind of funny, kind of lesson learned stories, and hinged on irony. The teller set themselves up as one thing, and the story proved something

else. It is implied, if not overtly stated, that the teller may need to change how they think about themselves. These stories *are* humorous, and again the laughter may be a release of tension, as we remember the times we've been wrong about ourselves.

Among my participants, there was some general feeling that the Carapace audience doesn't like stories in which the teller is a hero. Randy Osborne said:

We don't get so much
like we did in the early days
hero stories
where the teller
is the hero of the story.
Everything was so screwed up
and I came and
everything was fine.
Then
whenever you hear a story like that
[halfhearted clapping]
it's great [sarcastic].
If you hear a story like
everything was so screwed up
and I got in there and
I made it so much worse
and I don't know if I can ever fix it.
That story
yeah!
I can relate to that!

And Ian Campbell told me that he often hears and enjoys:

tales about how like
oh goodness
I really was clueless and
only then was it revealed to me
the extent of my cluelessness.
And those are funny 'cause
everybody can relate to that kind of thing.

When the teller reveals that they messed things up, or didn't live up to their own expectations, it's relatable. The audience wants to hear that the storytellers are human, just like they are.

I changed my situation.

Carapace. Atlanta. January, 2018. Theme: Turn Around

The next name called was "Joe the Griot." That's what he wrote on the paper. He started off saying he worked for the VA, answering phones. He worked different shifts and sometimes had odd hours. He said he took MARTA to work, a combination of busses and the subway. He was reading a book at the bus stop when a kid asked when the next bus was coming. Joe told him and went back to reading. Then he glanced over at the kid, who had put a "shiny metal thing" between them on the bench, pointing at Joe. He told Joe to hand over his money, wallet, and electronics. Joe told him, no, he needed to make a better choice. They went back and forth. The kid stood up and pointed the gun at Joe's head. Joe still said no, he needed to make a better choice. Finally the kid ran away.

There is a type of hero story that the Carapace audience does like. In fact, it is not just the Carapace audience. These are stories that often win at Moth slams and end up on national reality storytelling shows (Moth Mainstage, The Risk, Snap Judgement, etc.). Rather than the storytellers swooping in to save the day for someone else, the storytellers find themselves in a bad situation and save themselves.

We really need both kinds of stories. When the storyteller admits that s/he made a mistake, it's relatable. We are glad to see that the storyteller is like us. When the storyteller rescues him/herself, we hope we see ourselves in the teller. We hope that if we find ourselves in a similar situation, we can act with that strength. It is because the storytellers reveal themselves to be human that we can believe we *could* be like them when they are their own heroes.

I got justice.

Carapace. Atlanta. September, 2017. Theme: Honest Mistake

Theresa Davis was living in the projects and did some seamstress work off the books. A friend paid her \$79 for an outfit. When she went to cash the check, the teller gave her \$790. She tried to tell the teller to look at the check again, but the teller rudely told her she "knew how to do her job." Theresa stopped arguing and told her kids they could go shopping.

This one is a little different from “I changed my situation” because the teller’s situation may be unchanged, but someone who has wronged them got what they deserved. These stories often just feel satisfying. We love the idea of people who have harmed us getting punished.

Justice, often harsh, is a prevalent theme in fairy tales as well. Hansel and Gretel push the witch into the same oven she was going to use to cook them. When it shows up in personal stories we see that justice really can occur in real life as well.

Life is hard (I survived).

The change that happens in stories isn’t always positive (or good mixed with bad). Sometimes the stories have an unhappy ending. They are about the teller having to move into a new reality that is darker than the old one. The teller may have brought about the circumstances themselves. They may be living with the consequences of their mistakes. Or their unfortunate circumstances may have arisen due to events out of their control.

However, as Molly Read Woo pointed out:

I mean
there’s not a single story
that anyone at Carapace can tell
that didn’t end up
with the ending of
but they lived.
But I lived.
Not they lived.
But I lived.
I guess that’s some of the relief of it.
And we go home
with this like
whew!
That was a close call
but we lived!
Because we relate to the teller
we lived! You know
that was a terrible relationship
but we lived!
Oh! That was so sad

but we lived!
And we're still here
we got a second chance.
Tomorrow's another day.

The truth came out and it was hard.

Carapace. Atlanta. November 2017. Theme: In the Dark

Toward the end of college I lived in a duplex with three of my friends. While I was away one weekend and my sister was cat-sitting, one of my roommates confided in my sister that another roommate had shot my cat with an airsoft gun shortly after we all moved in. My cat had peed on his bed, which is legitimately aggravating. But instead of telling me about it he chased my cat through the house shooting him, and even continued shooting him after corning him behind the washing machine. Although everyone else in the house seemed to know about this, no one told me. They thought it would be inconvenient if I got upset and decided to move out. When I learned about the incident from my sister, more than a year after it had happened, I did move out. However, at that point it was near the end of the school year, and I continued paying my portion of the rent through the end of our lease that summer. After taking my cat and most of my belongings to my mother's house, I sent a brief email to my roommates to explain why I had left. The roommate who had shot my cat hit "reply all" to say that I was a bad cat mom and if I ever had kids would be a bad real mom, too. Those roommates are no longer part of my life and haven't been for many years. But I still have the cat, who is now 15 years old. The cat once again finds himself living with four humans: myself, my husband, and our children. We all love him and are always gentle and kind to him.

I put in this category both stories like this, in which the storyteller learns a difficult truth about someone/thing else, and stories in which the truth comes out about the storyteller. It is the truth coming out that brings about a change for the storyteller and forces him/her to proceed differently.

This story was challenging for me to tell at Carapace because it isn't funny, or especially edgy (like the menstrual cup story). Because I was a long-time regular, I have a reputation with at least some of the community and always feel more nervous about telling a serious story. I also have trouble with this story in particular, because I can easily come across as bitter. I don't want to just earn the audience's outrage on my behalf. I want to show that I have grown and moved on. The act of sharing this truth as a story, bringing it to light once again, was also hard.

I lost something (or someone) that can never be regained.

Carapace. Atlanta. January, 2018. Theme: Turn Around

Regeana Campbell told the first story. Her dad used to refer to the Falcons as the Falcoons and shout the n-word at the TV. She never went to daycare and was bad at making friends. In second grade she started an after school program. The first day she made a friend and they had a great time playing together. She was talking about her friend at home and her father asked if she was black, which she was. He told her not to play with the friend any more. Regina did tell the girl the next day that they couldn't play together. If she could make a turnaround today and do it over, she would choose to disobey her father.

Stories about death often end with this understanding that life now exists without that person. There are also stories, like Regina's, in which a person is lost, not through death, but through a falling out that can't be repaired (although Regina wishes for a do over). Like many of the stories of the truth coming out, these stories take the audience to a difficult place...and leave them there. However, as Molly observed, the audience could intuit the optimistic closing "but I lived."

You Are Not Alone

Because I feel like we do make those connections
where we think
my life is so unique.
I'm the only one who deals with this.
And then you realize
nope that is the human condition!
We are all dealing with some version of
what your story is.
Even if you think
well I've never told anybody this before.
It's like
yeah I've had something like that happen to me.
Maybe not exactly but
close. (Cris Gray)

And Carapace is your way of
helping you sort out
what makes us all common and
what makes us
all different

all at the same time. (B. Carr)

Tellers and listeners shared that the stories can be therapeutic for them, because they realize they are not alone in their life's struggles. Repeatedly, participants called the best stories "relatable." This, then, is an overarching message that comes from the stories themselves. Whatever else the stories are saying, they also tell both the teller and the audience, "you are not alone."

Butler (1988) recognizes the power of finding that your story relates to others' stories:

Indeed, the feminist impulse, and I am sure there is more than one, has often emerged in the recognition that my pain or my silence or my anger or my perception is finally not mine alone, and that it delimits me in a shared cultural situation which in turn enables and empowers me in certain unanticipated ways. (p. 522)

Realizing that "you are not alone" is not only comforting, but also empowering.

Meaning

The research question I began with asked how the Carapace community negotiates the making of meaning. It is useful, then, to understand what the meaning is they are making.

What is the message of Carapace?

The organizers cultivate the messages "you are a storyteller," "you have a story to tell," and "you are safe here." These messages are a prerequisite to producing the show. Without volunteer storytellers Carapace can't happen.

Both the organizers and the storytellers assert "this is the truth." Carapace is a place for true stories. The tellers also display moments of authentic vulnerability that go beyond factual truth.

These true stories relentlessly insist that "change happens." The message can be funny, or beautiful, or hard, but it is nearly always a message of change.

Because everyone there has dealt with change (funny, and beautiful, and hard), and because the storytellers are relatable, there is another message: "you are not alone."

CHAPTER 6: TURTLES IN THE WATER

The Water is Fine, But it's Okay to Stay in Your Shell

I tend to
let the show wash over me.
And
it's like
the experience is
what I remember.
The experience and the
feelings and the
satisfaction of everything. (R. Green)

There is a banner the organizers used to put up in the old room at Manuel's as a backdrop to the stage. It says "Carapace" and has a picture of a turtle. Underneath the word "Carapace" it says, "Everyone has a story. Come out of your shell."



Figure 11. Image of Carapace banner (Carapace, 2011)

The organizers and community try to make Carapace a safe space for true, personal stories. The stories themselves can also provide some safety and comfort to both storytellers and audience members. What Carapace, at its best, is really a safe space for, is vulnerability.

There are two general ways in which attendees are coaxed toward vulnerability. One way is by making the environment as comfortable as possible: Come out of your shell; the water is fine.

However, it's hard to make the water just right for everyone. So, the other method of encouraging vulnerability is, counterintuitively, by making vulnerability totally optional. Attendees do have a shell they can take refuge in.

The water is fine.

Some of the safeties planned into Carapace are meant to make the water feel as fine as possible. These are practices that shape the environment to make it more conducive for vulnerability. The physical and mental stimulations of the environment are pleasant. Bodies are comfortable to just be.

Lance described the venue as being like a swaddle. The visual and tactile sensations of being wrapped up are comforting. The food and alcohol taste good, and perhaps add to a desirable, relaxed mental state.

Carapace is a free show. This allows for a larger number of potential attendees, some of whom could not afford to attend a ticketed show. Bodies come into the space that could be excluded, or discouraged, by a door charge.

The fact that it is free is more comfortable for storytellers, who don't feel that they need to give the audience a show worthy of the ticket price. They are not obligated to create, through their "performances," sensations (aural, visual, mental) that please the audience. It is nicer for audience members, who don't feel cheated if they don't particularly enjoy the performances of the storytellers.

As Joyce Mitchell explained to me, The Moth intentionally uses judging and a cover charge to encourage "better" storytelling. Their model of show, although very similar to Carapace's, makes the storytellers a little more obligated to the audience, and this can result in more consistently higher quality performances. Joyce said that there are some stories in almost every Carapace show that aren't very good and that's "the price of freedom." There is a trade-off here, as there is with many of the choices the Carapace creators make. Carapace favors greater safety for the storytellers, and tries to make the audience feel safe enough to take the risk of hearing the tellers' stories.

The organizers have set aside a time and space for personal storytelling. The event gives permission for individuals to tell their stories. It is a place for bodies to speak and move and stimulate the minds of others with descriptions of their experiences.

The storytellers stand in a stage space, from which their gestures and expressions are more visible. They use a microphone, which makes their voices louder. These media enhance the bodies of the storytellers and facilitate their performances.

Contrastingly, the stage is minimal. The stage is not elevated and lighting across the room is equal (rather than bright on stage and dark on the "house"). Like the lack of a cover charge, the minimal stage removes expectations from the storytellers, giving them more freedom in how they can use their bodies.

There is no judging at Carapace and no judgment. Storytellers are not scored, but also, audience members are instructed not to heckle them, and to be polite. Lance Colley said that the lack of judging was intentional from the beginning to make the storytellers comfortable. They do not hear negative reactions from the audience.

The themes stimulate the minds of the storytellers, helping them discover what they have to share. Audience members can predict whether the mental stimulations they experience from hearing the stories will be agreeable to them. A potential audience member may decide to attend one evening, because she anticipates especially interesting stories on the theme "Left Behind." The same individual may steer clear when the theme is "Bad Romance," fearing she will hear triggering abuse stories. The theme gives audience members some idea of what to expect, which helps them decide whether or not to attend.

Anyone can tell a story. Lance Colley and Cris Gray, the former and current hosts, both asserted that when audience members picture themselves on stage, this helps them to be

kinder to the storytellers. In the early days, before the “Roy Rule” was firmly established, Lance occasionally admonished the audience:

If you think this is easy.
If any of you don't think this is nerve wracking as hell
why the fuck is your name not in that hat?
At that point you'd see the facial expression at that point go
Okay. Yes
you're right.
Hadn't really thought -

This creates greater safety for the storytellers. The audience is encouraged to feel empathy for them.

However, the fact that anyone can tell a story also has a distinct benefit for audience members. Storytellers at Carapace have much greater freedom of speech. They can tell any story (within some guidelines). Audience members are reminded every show not to heckle. They can't say just anything. The fact that any audience member can be a storyteller helps mitigate this inequality. If audience members want to speak, they do have the ability to step out of the audience.

The five-minute time limit makes the event as comfortable as possible for as many attendees as possible. A longer time limit can mentally and physically exhaust storytellers. Audience members can often endure hearing a story they don't enjoy for five minutes. Finally, by keeping the stories short, Carapace can accommodate more storytellers during the 90-minute show. The stage is a place many attendees wish to occupy. Part of the comfort of the event has to be helping people get there.

Along those same lines, the hat also helps balance the different interests of various attendees and get bodies on the stage. It allows an equal opportunity for storytellers to be selected when there are too many tellers to get to in 90 minutes, and it provides a random way

to determine order. The three strikes rule removes the possibility of bad luck keeping any particular individual off the stage for more than three months.

The rule about actually telling a story, “no comedy routines, no political rants, no poetry,” helps make audience members comfortable. They have an idea of what to expect (stories) and feel some assurance that they will not be lectured at by someone with a stage and an agenda. Once again, they can predict that the mental stimulations initiated by the performance are likely to be pleasing to them.

Although audience members are willing to put up with a not-great story here and there, they do wish to, overall, have a good time. The regular attendees I spoke to find Carapace to be an enjoyable event with some uncomfortable moments. In spite of the safeties offered to audience members, they certainly wouldn’t stay if they found the entire show unpleasant. There are those, such as Frank and June Causey, who did find too much of the show uncomfortable, and decided not to return.

The practices of this community around where they meet, how they set up their space, and how they conduct the ritual of Carapace (the rules) are meant to create a comfortable environment. The water feels fine. The physical and mental stimuli attendees experience are mostly pleasant. Their bodies can come into the space and behave in comfortable ways, without worrying too much about creating a certain experience for others.

This is not to say that the experience of Carapace is meant to be entirely feel-good. Some discomfort is completely expected. A core aspect of this event is that difficult stories are welcome. These stories are likely to be at least a little uncomfortable for the tellers to share, and for the audience to hear. The other comforts exist to make the discomforts more bearable.

Positive sensations don’t exactly cancel out negative ones but make them easier to endure. This is something we understand and enact in many parts of our daily lives. We hold a

child's hand as they get a flu shot. Friends instruct us to sit down before sharing bad news. When we can't avoid discomfort, we add comfort to it.

Carapace attendees do experience moments of discomfort. This may be discomfort related to the stories, or it may be discomfort from the environment (despite the best efforts of the organizers to prevent this). In truly vulnerable moments attendees embrace the discomfort, but one of the safe things about Carapace is that this isn't required. Attendees have the option of retreating into their shells.

It's okay to stay in your shell.

Carapace attendees are able to retreat into their shells to protect themselves from aspects of the event that are uncomfortable for them. The organization and practices of the community facilitate this retreat. Attendees can shield themselves from physical and mental stimuli they find unpleasant. They can also retreat to avoid giving away too much information about themselves.

Not everyone likes the food at Manuel's and some attendees don't drink alcohol. One way attendees are allowed to retreat into their shells is by not purchasing food or drink. No purchase is necessary to attend. Attendees block the taste and other mental and physical sensations of the food and drink by not taking them into their bodies. They keep this part of the environment separate from themselves.

Smell is harder to avoid. Shannon Turner even mentioned her clothes smelling of fried food at the end of the night. The scent comes home with her. However, it is possible to block some odors with added distance.

It's not ever been a problem
except once.
Shannon McNeal had a scotch
right
there. [tapped table]
And

I had to ask Shannon Turner to change seats with me
so I wasn't smelling it.
'Cause scotch is what I loved. (E. Brownfield)

Eleanor, a recovered alcoholic, got more distance to avoid the smell of the scotch.

The political history of Manuel's could also make more conservative attendees feel uncomfortable. They may feel that their bodies are not welcome in this building. Although I could not really quantify this through my observations in this study or elsewhere, the reality storytelling scene (and perhaps the larger storytelling scene as well) seems to skew liberal, so more conservative attendees might feel out of place regardless of the venue. They may be averse to the mental stimulations of the stories that are told at Carapace (as multiple participants suggested). At this time I have not observed a good way for conservatives to shield themselves from the discomfort of the venue or the stories (other than not attending). I do not fault the Carapace creators for this. Finding a way to make people with different political views feel more comfortable around one another could help solve some serious national problems and is deserving of further consideration beyond Carapace.

The bar venue allows attendees to retreat into their shells by literally leaving the room if they need to. They can cut themselves off from the aural and visual stimuli of the storytelling performance, or from others in the room. Unlike in a theater setting, movement during the show is considered quite normal and there is no social pressure to remain seated while a storyteller is on stage.

Audience members who are not so uncomfortable they leave the room can make more minor retreats. They might mentally check out and not pay attention to a story. They are still hearing the story, and the other sounds of the room. They may still look at the storyteller. They have blunted mental stimulation by diverting their attention.

Eleanor Brownfield also talked about just not making eye contact with a storyteller when the story got too intimate. In this case, the audience member hears the story but has changed the nature of the visual stimulus.

Some attendees may not feel safe around other attendees, and they may not all like each other, but they have no obligation to interact with one another. They can, socially, stay inside their shells, cutting off possible stimuli from other audience members. This might mean sitting far away from someone they don't want to talk to, or just choosing not to engage them in conversation. Joyce said if she weren't an organizer, she probably wouldn't talk to other attendees. I observed attendees who arrived early and were happy to sit with whomever ended up next to them. I saw others save spaces around them for their friends who were coming later. There were those who end up seated with strangers or acquaintances, and then mostly kept to themselves.

The "coming out of your shell" referenced on the Carapace banner refers to storytellers, taking a chance and telling vulnerable stories. The practice of allowing anyone to be a storyteller is one of the safe and equitable things about Carapace. Of course, attendees can also stay in their shells and not tell a story. Anyone can perform, but no one has to. Just as some bodies long for the stage, others feel much safer out of the (non existent, at Carapace) spotlight.

I will note here that on nights when the hat is "light" (not many names), Cris does put a little more pressure on the audience to produce storytellers. At the October 2017 show I made the following observation:

Cris said he was "vamping" because there weren't many names in the hat. He reminded the audience that "we make the show happen" and without more names there would be a short show.

Certainly no one is singled out and asked personally to perform. However, this extra pressure may nudge some reluctant turtles from their shells, for the good of Carapace. This particular retreat (choosing not to perform) is occasionally challenged, because if too many audience members take it, there really is no show.

On this particular night, *I* was impacted by Cris's prodding. I hadn't planned to tell, and so I was distracted during some of the early stories of the evening, trying to decide if there was a story I could tell after all. However, I watched several people drop their names in the hat as the night went on, and I figured there were probably enough after that. Others may have felt the same way I did. It was not obvious that any of the tellers who were called that night had put their names in the hat specifically because of Cris's comments (the late names may have been late either way). Sometimes tellers will start with "I wasn't planning to tell tonight, but..." This actually often happens without solicitation, but because another story inspired them. Without that intro, I can't be sure which stories, if any, weren't planned.

I do have the sense, from informal conversations, that other regulars like myself feel they should be the ones to step up if needed. Those who have been around longer have an affection for the event and are more invested in its success. Also, more experienced storytellers believe that they should be able to tell a story whenever called upon to do so.

In a way, Carapace attendees are in the water together, but are also within a larger shell that protects them from the outside world. The closed room is physically like a shell. The people in the room together are safe(ish) for each other because they are all there for the same reason. As David Russell put it:

You know that door's closed and everybody is there for the storytelling
and they have that one purpose in mind.
It just felt like you know
we're all in this together.

Carapace attendees retreat from the outside world, which is not as amenable to vulnerability, and share one big protective shell in which vulnerability is welcome and facilitated. Just as attendees may be moved to come out of their shells within the environment of Carapace, perhaps what they experience there moves them to be more vulnerable and adventurous in their lives outside the greater Carapace shell.

Storytellers in shells.

The practice of treating the performances that happen at Carapace as much closer to the “social performance” end of the spectrum than the “theatrical performance” end gives storytellers permission to retreat into their shells in small ways, even as they come out of their shells to go on stage.

One way storytellers partially retreat into their shells is by literally, physically retreating, and putting more distance between themselves and the audience. Some storytellers back all the way up to the wall, instead of standing in the middle of the stage space. I witnessed Shannon Turner hold the microphone stand, like a barrier, in front of herself, even though she had the microphone in her hand (not in the stand). She told me in our interview:

You may have noticed
the whole night
the mic stand stayed over in the corner.
Then I just pulled it out because I needed something to play with.
I needed something to hide behind
while I was telling my story.

Some storyteller bodies feel safer further away from the audience. They don’t want their bodies to be too well seen because they are uncertain what information they might give away.

Similarly, some storytellers show discomfort with the microphone. Some hold it too far from their mouths. Others drop it, like a hot potato, into the nearest hand if Cris isn’t right there to take it at the end of their story. The microphone amplifies the voice and the voice is more

than just a conveyor of words. It can convey emotion. Again, some storytellers shy away, uneasy about being too well heard.

A very personal and subtle way that storytellers retreat into their shells is by avoiding eye contact with audience members. Tom McGowan said he doesn't make as much eye contact while telling more difficult stories. Eyes can give away emotion. Saying the words of a difficult story is not the same as really communicating how it felt. I have observed, often newer, storytellers looking at the back wall, or the floor rather than the audience. Making eye contact can let emotions seep out.

Goffman (1986) says that sometimes an "individual will capsize as an interactant, and in this mode of self-removal fail to assemble himself--at least temporarily--for much of any other kind of organized role" (p. 350). The person breaks from character, the character being how they would normally conduct themselves in a given situation. Goffman's (1986) examples of flooding out behavior include "dissolving into laughter or tears or anger, or running from an event in panic and terror" (p. 350). I didn't see anyone completely "capsize" during my time observing Carapace. True flooding out is not common, but certainly possible. What storytellers seem to be protecting themselves from is an unbidden trickling out of emotion. They try to prevent this, partly by controlling their bodies.

Storytellers also hide in their shells by not telling the whole story. Either in what they say or how they behave, they choose not to be completely vulnerable. As Tricia Stearns said, "I didn't have to share anything I didn't want to share."

Another way storytellers hold back in what they say is through humor. For a different project in 2015, I talked to Shannon McNeal, a Georgia storyteller and early Carapace regular. She said of learning to tell personal stories from her family:

And you're gonna end -
it's gonna be funny

and it's gonna end on a high note.
And
you leave out a lot of the pain

Storytellers do this at Carapace. Audience members can sometimes see through it. When they think back on what has been said (rather than how it was said) they realize it must have been painful. Benjamin Carr said of another teller:

this person's clearly in pain.
He's acting like he's not
and he wants us all
to act like we don't notice it either.
What is our duty as a human being
to see someone else in pain and
act like we don't see it?

Storytellers are not always completely vulnerable and hold back their pain.

This community has a practice of allowing attendees to retreat into their shells, and individuals do retreat as part of their interaction with the community. They manage what they allow into and out of their shells during their time at Carapace.

CHAPTER 6: STIMULUS MANAGEMENT AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

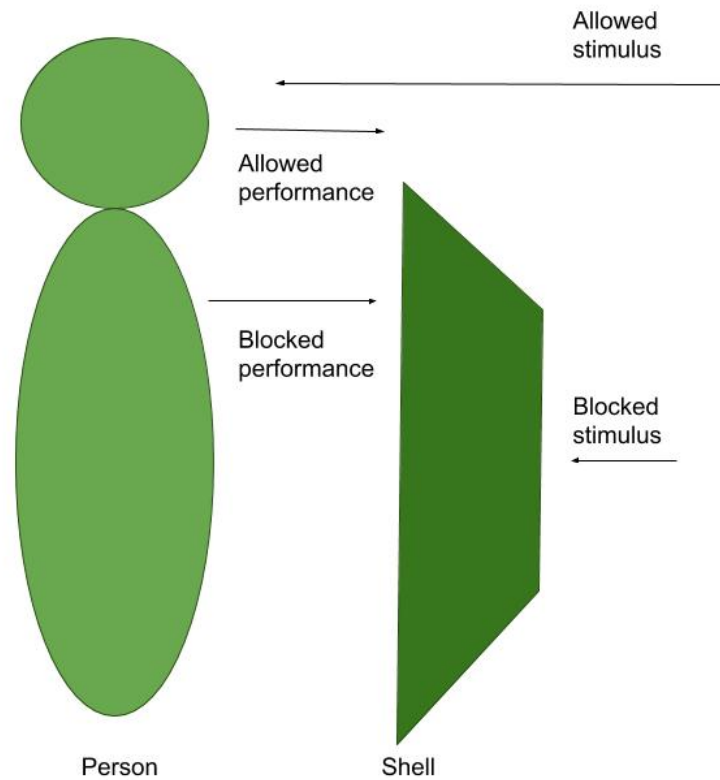


Figure 12. A person partially shielded

Carapace attendees, and possibly people in other communication situations as well, block certain stimuli while allowing others, and simultaneously block some personal performances while allowing others. They regulate both the information coming to them and the information flowing from them.

Stimulus Management

The ways in which Carapace attendees retreat into their shells to avoid certain stimuli seem to have a relationship with information avoidance or blunting. Research on blunting suggests that when individuals face a crisis (Pang, 2014) or are “threatened with an aversive event” (Miller, 1987, p. 345) they tend to respond in one of two ways. Some people are “monitors” or “information seekers,” others are “blunters” or “distractors” (Miller, 1987, p. 345). Blunters avoid information about the unpleasant event or crisis, sometimes actively seeking out distracting information instead (Miller, 1987).

Sweeny et al. (2010) define “information avoidance” as “any behavior intended to prevent or delay the acquisition of available but potentially unwanted information” (p. 341). They argue that people avoid information for three main reasons: “information may demand a change in beliefs” (p. 343), “information may demand undesired action” (p. 343), or “information may cause unpleasant emotions or diminish pleasant emotions” (p. 344). In almost all of these situations, the information could be described as uncomfortable. The one exception to this falls within the third category and involves “enhancing or prolonging positive emotions” by avoiding information that might, for example, give away a surprise (p. 344).

Research on avoidance and blunting often involves individuals seeking or avoiding information on a specific topic, like a health problem. An individual might get a diagnosis and then avoid learning more about their health condition. It is possible for Carapace attendees to avoid entire uncomfortable topics. For example, if an attendee doesn’t want to hear about sexual assault, as soon as they realize a story is going that way they can leave the room.

However, other retreats at Carapace are more nuanced. Most people stay and listen to the story. If it makes them uncomfortable they perhaps, don’t look at the storyteller. By doing this they haven’t avoided the topic of sexual assault, but they have changed their experience of

the story. They break the intensity of their connection with the storyteller, and feel the weight of the story a bit less. It could be argued that the information the listener gleans from the story is different because they averted their eyes. So, the listener could be said to have avoided the information as it would have come across with both audio and visual stimuli. They haven't avoided the topic, though.

This is a different way of thinking about information avoidance. Rather than avoiding a topic altogether, individuals soften a topic for themselves by avoiding some of the stimuli that are otherwise part of the experience. In order to get at this idea that individuals are accepting some stimuli and blunting others, I suggest a new term: stimulus management.

Stimulus management is about allowing or disallowing certain physical and mental stimuli that are part of an environment and a communication experience.

Stimulus management has definite overlap with the concept of selective attention as well. Research on selective attention within the field of cognitive psychology asks how and why we attend to the things we do. We may pay attention to stimuli because they are novel, which is likely linked to survival instinct (Bradley, 2009). We actively try to pay attention to important tasks while in a distracting situation (Lavie, 2005). Our environments are full of potential stimuli and we can not attend to all of them.

Stimulus management is useful as an information concept because it better includes situations in which an individual is paying attention, but is selective about which types of stimuli they are willing to receive from whatever they are attending to. An audience member who chooses to look away during a difficult story may still be paying very close attention to the storyteller. What is happening is not that the *attention* is directed elsewhere, only the *eyes*. The individual may not even notice whatever they are now looking at. They have changed their experience, but they haven't changed their attention.

Impression Management

The ways in which Carapace attendees retreat into their shells to avoid giving away too much information relates to Goffman's (1959) "impression management." He says "when one's activity occurs in the presence of other persons, some aspects of the activity are expressively accentuated and other aspects, which might discredit the fostered impression, are suppressed" (Goffman, 1959, p. 111). People perform so as to give a certain impression of themselves. They perform in a way appropriate to the situation they are in. They also portray themselves in a favorable way, hiding information about themselves they don't want others to know.

Storytellers at Carapace "perform" as if they are not performing, since many aspects of the event suggest that it is "not a performance." However, they also retreat into their shells to avoid giving too much away. Some actively diminish the power of the stage and the microphone so that the audience can't see and hear them quite so clearly. This is less about performing correctly, and more about hiding any minor glitches in their performance. It is still about managing the impression they are giving.

Not only storytellers at Carapace, but also audience members engage in impression management. They want to appear to be good audience members, playing their role correctly. Roy Green said that when Carapace was being filmed, he was conscious that the camera panned the audience:

I was more aware of
where the roving camera was because
I wanted to make sure that
if it pointed at me
that I wasn't
sticking my finger up my nose or
something like that.

Audience members give some thought to what their performance is giving away about them, even though they aren't the center of attention (like the storyteller is). How much they perform

may vary depending on how watched they feel themselves to be. Carapace is no longer filmed, but audience members can see each other, as the house lights are not dimmed. Shannon Turner said that she and some friends engage in “eye talk.” They at least have some expectation that those around them can see them and might allocate some attention to what they are doing.

At Carapace, attendees avoid giving away too much information. “Too much” is relative. An attendee might feel they have given away too much if they have revealed something about themselves they didn’t really want others to know and/or have made themselves uncomfortable.

In what they say and in how they perform attendees hide some of themselves. Goffman (1959) talks about a back stage, as an area near the performance space, where the performance is contradicted (p. 112). When attendees are vulnerable, they reveal parts of themselves that are in the backstage relative to most of their other social performance spaces (work, grocery store, etc.). Cris Gray alluded to this when he talked about revealing parts of himself the Carapace audience might not like:

So I’m just kind of like
yeah let’s
get a peek at what’s behind each other’s curtain
just a sliver!
’Cause I always feel like
yeah it may
drive some people away
but I also think
there will be bonds that
grow even stronger because
we did let each other look
behind the curtain and see
a little bit of our dark side.

However, Carapace attendees still hide parts of themselves. The shell is similar here to the curtain that hides the area behind the stage. Who they are when they are backstage, relative to the Carapace stage, is obscured by their performance of themselves at Carapace.

Doing Both at the Same Time

The shells, then, are a combination of a sort of information avoidance I am calling stimulus management, and impression management. Although these theories have been discussed at some length on their own, to my knowledge, they have not been presented in conjunction with one another before. Discussing them together, allows us to look at how the shell blocks information in both directions.

Part of Ong's (2008) criticism of the conduit metaphor of communication is that

the message is moved from sender-position to receiver-position. In real human communication, the sender has to be not only in the sender position but also in the receiver position before he or she can send anything. (p. 173)

In fact, in oral communication, and perhaps all types of communication, all parties are constantly "senders" and "receivers." They are actually all, co-creators.

During the storytelling that occurs at Carapace, it would be easy to view the storyteller as the "sender" and each audience member as a "receiver." It is true that the storyteller does the majority of the talking, but audience members sometimes call out and also communicate in numerous non-verbal ways. The storyteller "receives" this feedback. All parties are sending and receiving, and in fact, shape the story that is ultimately told, together.

Because every person involved is both a sender and receiver, it is useful to consider the impact of simultaneously managing both what their bodies are doing and what is being done to their bodies (and minds). A storyteller at Carapace chooses to be vulnerable to some stimuli (hearing audience feedback) but blunts the impact of other stimuli (creates maximum physical distance between self and audience). At the same time, that storyteller is open and honest with

their telling of the events of the story but avoids eye contact to keep from giving away the depth of their emotions. This is a lot, to think about protecting oneself from information, while thinking about protecting oneself from giving away too much information at the same time.

Unsurprisingly, cutting off communication in one direction can also have the effect of cutting it off in the other. Eye contact is an excellent example. It is common for people to avoid eye contact to avoid revealing too much. However, without eye contact they are also diminishing visual stimuli from the others with whom they are interacting. This is a value in considering these theories together. There is one shell, but it can work in both directions, even if only one direction is intended.

This doesn't work so exactly with every sense. Choosing to be silent doesn't result in the attendee being unable hear (although they are limiting the opportunity to hear feedback that might result from what is said). Choosing not to hear doesn't actively prevent the attendee from talking, either. However, it is difficult not to hear unless the attendee leaves the room. Then they can talk to themselves, but those at Carapace won't be able to hear them.

Randy Osborne noted this, about hearing, in a comment on the blog:

There's that big difference between seeing someone, whether onstage or seated at the tables, and hearing them. We see so many things and people at Carapace and in our everyday lives, always at an evaluative distance. Hearing a person closes that distance. It's like loud music from a passing car. You can't decline to hear (plug your ears? Awkward) as easily as you can decline to see, by averting your eyes.

Sound penetrates. Avoiding it is usually going to mean cutting off options for communicating and eliminating other stimuli as well. If an attendee leaves the room, she can no longer talk to those in the room, and she can no longer see them either. Covering ears (with hands or headphones) is, as Randy suggests, awkward. It also ruins the social performance of being a good audience member. An attendee might need to leave the room to take a call or use the restroom. Covering the ears just seems rude.

CHAPTER 7: CONNECTING

There will be bonds that
grow even stronger because
we did let each other look
behind the curtain and see
a little bit of our dark side. (C. Gray)

The shells help make Carapace attendees feel safe, and ultimately, this sense of safety can actually motivate attendees to come out of their shells. Members of the Carapace community do take the risk of true vulnerability. This vulnerability leads to connection.

Touching

During the September 2017 Carapace, one of the storytellers, Anna, told a difficult story about her first husband committing suicide. He told her to go ahead, to visit family for Christmas without him, saying he would follow a few days later. Alone in their house, he killed himself. As she neared the end of the story, she faltered a bit saying this brought her to “her Benji.” Benjamin Carr was sitting at one of the tables near the stage area. She reached out for his hand and he shifted to reach back. They touched. Then she was able to continue her thought. She said she would never make that mistake again. When her friends are having a hard time she makes sure to talk to them every day. She won’t leave them alone.

When Carapace attendees are vulnerable and come out of their shells, exposing their soft, sensitive inner beings and truly risking vulnerability they become connected. Anna and Benjamin literally touched during Anna’s story. They connected. Anna was supported and able to finish her story. I talked to Benjamin that evening and he was truly moved by his role in helping Anna finish. Other connections are less physical but are still very much felt.

Being touched in a sensitive spot can be pleasurable but can also be agonizing. In a comment on the blog, Randy said communal storytelling provides a “quality of togetherness.” He also got at the fact that this connection is desirable but can be a little uncomfortable. “It’s a sticky, difficult, rather complicated kind of warmth that certain people, not everybody, are able to tolerate, even welcome” (R. Osborne). This relates to Ong’s (2008) ideas on communication being “agonistic” (p. 43).

Ong (2008) says that “By keeping knowledge embedded in the human lifeworld, orality situates knowledge within a context of struggle” (pp. 43-44). He gives the following examples of oral combat: riddles (interactive, tricky), bragging, insult competitions (yo’ mama), and portrayals of physical violence in oral stories (p. 44). I would add jokes to this evidence: a highly oral art form that often hinges on an insult or makes the listener groan. The spoken word has power. Talking to someone does something to them. It is not a neutral transfer of information. It is like poking them.

Story sharing is interactive. Both the storyteller and the listeners are “doing something” to one another. They provoke reactions from one another, almost as if they are poking each other. At their most vulnerable, they are most able to feel this connection. As the word “agonistic” implies, with its close etymological ties to “agony,” being poked in a soft spot can hurt. It can also feel wonderful.

If this poking metaphor is starting to sound sexual, why not? Some of the people I talked to related personal storytelling to other very intimate, embodied activities. Randy Osborne noticed that food stories often come up at Carapace, and he said, “food is a very intimate thing.” Feeding a person is literally putting something inside of them that changes them and becomes part of their body. Storytelling does the same. Molly came right out and compared storytelling with sex. She called it “sex without sex” (M. R. Woo).

The safeties of Carapace are largely so that there will be a show. Ordinary people must feel safe enough to get on stage and tell their personal stories. It is obvious, with a quick glance at some other reality storytelling shows that the level of safety offered by Carapace isn't strictly necessary for the show to go on. At The Moth, for example, the judging, cover charge, and often hotter stage (there is some variation between cities), make storytellers less safe, but volunteers take the risk anyway. For these tellers, the desire for 15 minutes of fame may outweigh any anxieties about public speaking. Certainly there are those who are too intimidated by this set-up and don't volunteer; however, there are enough that do to keep the show going.

The level of safety provided by Carapace, then, goes beyond simply securing volunteer storytellers. It also encourages vulnerability, which leads to connection. Attendees may feel safe enough to come out of their shells, fully feeling the effects of their interactions with each other. This is a risk. Being vulnerable can hurt. It can also feel good in a way that nothing else does.

Collective Unconscious

But you think about storytelling –
you strip away
what you look like
your race
your class
the body that you came in and you tell
something about your spirit.
And you share that.
And I started thinking –
that's about as intimate as you can get.
It goes beyond your body you know.
It goes into your mind and your feelings
and your thoughts. (M. R. Woo)

The intimacy of story sharing goes beyond even the body. The body is like another shell. Through vulnerability in storytelling, Carapace attendees get past even that, and touch one another's spirits. Perhaps this is like a cartoon turtle, who sets the shell aside while showering. Or, straying slightly from the turtle image, the "shell" is more of a permeable membrane, and

how permeable is up to the individual. Molly even suggested that listeners can *become* the storyteller:

For a while I'm Christopher
for a while I'm Benji
for a while I'm Sarah
for a while I'm
anybody that tells a story. (M. R. Woo)

Through the vulnerability of being truly open to one another, Carapace attendees become one another. Amanda Roundtree similarly expressed that sharing personal stories is the closest you can get to getting into another person's head.

So I think it's that immediate
validation and connection
that we're not alone
in this world even though
we're walking around all the time
alone
even with a lot of people
you're still -
[outside of storytelling] nobody can get in your head right?
It's just you.

Sharing stories vulnerably with one another is a way to get out of the shells of our heads, of our own consciousnesses.

In *The Shallows*, Carr (2011) talks about people engaging with a medium rather than with content. The medium he concerns himself with is the Internet, and he suggests that people hop from article to article to video to social media, in flow with the Internet, but not with the things they are reading or viewing. McLuhan (2003) argues that content is an illusion, so the medium is the only thing a person *can* engage with. At Carapace, media include the stage, the microphone, the story, the performance, etc. They certainly influence what happens, but the audience seems to look beyond them. The story is also a medium, and some people do stop there. Joyce said, "They may connect and make some kind of friendship with a story" (J. Mitchell).

Many attendees do move past the story and make a connection with the person. Lance suggested that Carapace could offer attendees a break from engaging with their technology, allowing them the opportunity to engage with another human being instead:

here
come here
we are going to get rid of all the cell phones
we are going to get rid of all the screens
for about an hour
hour and a half and we're just
going to be connected with one another. (L. Colley)

Carapace offers attendees a break from technologies that grab our attention and distract us from the people physically around us. At Carapace, attendees also have a chance of seeing through all the media present to make a human connection. The other person is the content hidden within the media.

Personal stories especially lend themselves to moving from the story to the teller. Randy said

we're ordinary people telling ordinary stories to each other
and appreciating each other's existence. (R. Osborne)

Again and again in my conversations with Carapace attendees they made this jump from talking about the story to talking about the teller. The two are almost inseparable. By connecting with the story, attendees often do connect with the person.

McLuhan (2003) claims that consciousness removed humanity from the collective unconscious, and every medium for communication since has created more distance. He had high hopes for digital media creating a new "cosmic consciousness":

Today [originally published in 1964] computers hold out the promise of a means of instant translation of any code or language into any other code or language. The computer, in short, promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity. The next logical step would seem to be, not to translate, but to by-pass languages in favor of a general cosmic consciousness which might be very like the collective unconscious dreamt of by Bergson. The condition of "weightlessness" that biologists say promises a physical immortality, may be paralleled by the condition of

speechlessness that could confer a perpetuity of collective harmony and peace.
(McLuhan, 2003, p. 114)

However, I would argue that Internet filter bubbles strengthen individualism, and so this hasn't really panned out.

Pariser (2011) describes the bubble created by customization algorithms:

The new generation of Internet filters looks at the things you seem to like--the actual things you've done, or the things people like you like--and tries to extrapolate. They are prediction engines, constantly creating and refining a theory of who you are and what you'll do and want next. Together, these engines create a unique universe of information for each of us--what I've come to call a filter bubble--which fundamentally alters the way we encounter ideas and information. (p. 9)

One of the big problems with the filter bubble, Pariser (2011) points out, is that "you're alone in it" (p. 9). The Internet, the height of electronic communication in 2018, is not connecting individuals to the collective unconscious, but further separating them. Vulnerability, in live, personal storytelling is bringing people back together.

Storytellers can be vulnerable in the way they share their stories, encouraging listeners to get out of their own heads temporarily and make a connection with another human.

Listeners are also vulnerable when they truly go on that journey. As Molly said of listening to very vulnerable stories, "I almost feel like I'm revealing myself and I don't want to" (M. R. Woo). It can take listeners to places that do not feel completely safe, but it leads to connection. Speech may have created self-awareness as McLuhan (2003), Bergson (2000), and Mithen (2006) suggest. However, the vulnerability that can accompany oral interactions allows us to approach the collective unconscious.

The connections made at Carapace are not surprising, as others have observed that such communal activities can have this effect. Mithen (2006) notes that when "people join together for a group activity - a family meal, a meeting with work colleagues, a football team assembling for a match - they typically arrive from quite different immediate experiences" (p. 214). The group members come together different, but music can make them more alike.

"Those who make music together will mould their own minds and bodies into a shared emotional state, and with that will come a loss of self-identity and a concomitant increase in the ability to cooperate with others" (Mithen, 2006, p. 215).

Others have previously discussed how storytelling, specifically brings people together. Sturm (2000) says that audience members at a storytelling performance prefer "to feel part of a community in which they could disappear" (p. 297). Georges's (1969) model of what happens at a storytelling event visually shows the storyteller and audience member merging (pp. 320-321).

The "meaning" that is ultimately shared at Carapace, "you are not alone," further indicates this connection and feeling of shared experience. It is one thing to tell another person they are not alone. However, the statement is only really true if they allow themselves to be with you. Togetherness requires some openness and vulnerability from everyone involved.

If there is a shared consciousness humanity could tap into, this is the way to it.

CHAPTER 8: CLOSING REMARKS

I began with the question: *How does the Carapace community negotiate the making of meaning?*

In learning about Carapace through the method of performance ethnography, I was able to piece together the stated and unstated rules, and better understand what was going on. I observed that most of the practices of the Carapace community exist to create a safe space for sharing personal stories. And, although storytellers have a great deal of freedom in what they can say, there are safeties for the audience members as well. These safeties help them to take the risk of hearing even bad or uncomfortable stories.

Bad and uncomfortable stories do happen, but overall, Carapace attendees genuinely enjoy the event. They find the story sharing to be entertaining and therapeutic. Tellers and listeners come to feel that they are not alone. The safe environment encourages vulnerability, which can further lead to a feeling of connection. Perhaps this connection even approaches the collective unconscious.

Embodied Information Practices

Previous research on embodied information practices has focused largely on how bodies are involved in sense-making (e.g. Olsson & Lloyd, 2017a; Olsson & Lloyd, 2017b; Olsson, 2016; Olsson, 2010). Bodies are used to learn things about the world, for example, by archaeologists interacting with artifacts (Olsson, 2016). Actors use their bodies to help audiences make sense of Shakespeare's work (Olsson, 2010).

This study broadens our understanding of embodied information practices in that it looks at the role of bodies beyond sense-making; or, perhaps before sense-making. Bodies must feel

a certain level of safety in a space and around other bodies before certain conversations can take place. Individuals use their bodies to be more or less vulnerable, which influences their experiences with challenging information.

How close bodies are to one another and where they are in relation to one another also impacts communication. At Carapace, for example, the minimal stage puts storytellers and audience members closer together (than a theatrical stage would). This increases intimacy and the feeling that storytellers are simply talking with their friends in a bar, rather than performing on stage. The ability of these individuals to feel a sense of connection with each other is influenced by the placement of their bodies.

Libraries

This study illustrates a tension between safe spaces and free speech that is present in other contexts. In higher education there has been a push back against “safe spaces,” claiming that they inhibit intellectual freedom. Whitten (2018) writes:

Compared to other environments, such as workplaces or secondary schools, students and academics should (in theory) be encouraged to explore particularly difficult subjects, to take risks regarding emerging areas of research, and to debate some of the most contentious and pertinent issues of our time. (para. 7)

A university cannot promise safety when discomfort is necessary for growth.

A possible compromise is the creation of “brave spaces.” Arao and Clemens (2013) suggest ground rules for creating a brave space, where issues of diversity and social justice can be discussed (p. 135).

- 1) “Controversy with civility” (p. 144). Conflict is to be expected in a diverse group but should not be the end of the conversation.
- 2) “Own your intentions and your impact” (p. 145). Understand and discuss how actions impact others, even when harm is unintentional.
- 3) “Challenge by choice” (p. 146). Students decide how much they will participate in difficult conversations.
- 4) “Respect” (p 147). This rule seems self-explanatory, but the authors suggest it is worth discussing. What students understand as respectful behavior may vary by culture.

- 5) "No attacks" (p. 148). Students should not use intentionally harmful statements toward one another.

The "shells" at Carapace are closely tied to this idea of "challenge by choice," and indicate that there may be additional ways to allow participants in difficult discussions to protect themselves (beyond just not discussing).

Libraries must also concern themselves with the tension between safety and free speech. Libraries wish to facilitate a free flow of information and libraries also wish to be safe spaces. This research indicates that there is a way forward that balances these apparently competing interests.

The ground rules of Carapace have grown up around the group and make that particular community feel safe. Each library's community will likely have different needs. However, libraries can begin with the intention of providing both "water is fine" safeties and "shell" safeties, and then learn about their community to figure out what exactly those safeties will look like for them. The most important safety, as in Carapace, will likely be ensuring that every person truly believes they have a voice. How to achieve that will, again, be based on a knowledge of the community, and will likely be an ongoing project.

Based on this study, however, I can make some suggestions on how libraries might incorporate some ideas from Carapace in their practice.

A desk (reference, circulation, etc.) often separates librarians and patrons, just as a stage separates performers and audience members. For some patrons that separation may be welcome, but for others the illusion of a more casual conversation might be better. Librarians can step out from behind the desk to make patrons feel more like they are talking with a friend.

Libraries often have programs that utilize more or less of a stage. For example, some libraries have auditoriums with an actual theatrical stage on which they share performances. Programs like children's story times likely don't take place on stage, but a stage space is

created around the librarian. Libraries can look for ways to invite patrons on stage. Perhaps the library can host an open mic night, during which patrons can share their talents. The library can also host unstaged events. A program in which patrons are encouraged to share personal stories with one another might have everyone sit in a circle, so that each individual is similarly oriented toward the others and there is no apparent stage.

Some libraries are already doing Carapace-type things to make their buildings more inviting spaces, such as allowing/selling food and drink, including community artwork, and having comfortable furniture. Chancellor (2017) illustrates that the library building can also function as a refuge in times of crisis, citing the “Ferguson Municipal Public Library and the Baltimore Public Library following the police shooting of Michael Brown and the death of Freddie Gray” as examples (p. 6). Both libraries remained open to their communities when schools and businesses were closed. “Community members were able to gather and be in a *space* and *place* where there was calm even though there was turbulence going on directly outside the library’s doors. It essentially became a safe haven to all” (Chancellor, 2017, p. 7).

Storytelling Festivals

As illustrated through the KSU teller example from Harvey (2008), unexpected reality storytelling on stage at a storytelling festival causes a breach. The unspoken contract that the storyteller will keep the audience safe is broken and drama ensues. Can reality storytelling happen at traditionally produced storytelling festivals?

There have been some attempts to bring reality storytelling to festival and conference venues. The National Storytelling Festival has hosted a slam on one evening of the festival for the past several years (International Storytelling Center, 2019). The National Storytelling Network also hosts a story slam as part of the yearly conference (National Storytelling Network, 2019). Before conducting this study, I was of the opinion that simply giving the audience a

reasonable idea of what to expect would be enough to facilitate reality storytelling successfully at events such as this. An audience should not be made unsafe without warning. However, if they know what they are getting in to they will be more accepting of difficult stories.

After spending time with the Carapace community, I no longer believe that such a simple solution can suffice. Story slams do take place at these events with some “success,” but I now find it doubtful that these slams invite the same challenging stories that events like Carapace invite, and I doubt that the same sense of connection can be achieved.

The more theatrical setting at festivals puts storytellers on a hot stage and audience members in a position from which it is more difficult to extricate themselves. There is a great deal of money involved in attending. Finally, the idea that “anyone can tell” is less believable when slam storytellers are chosen ahead of time and/or the number of hopeful tellers is much larger than the number of those who actually get to tell. Both these scenarios are further aggravated by the fact that the National Festival and conference each take place only once a year. Tellers can go years without taking the stage at these slams and may never get the opportunity at all. As the possibility to tell is the biggest safety given to audience members, its absence seriously diminishes the ability of these events to encourage vulnerability.

If festivals and conferences really wish to welcome reality storytelling into their midst, they need to do more than host an evening slam on their stage with their rules. Perhaps by learning from the model of Carapace and by collaborating with a local reality storytelling event, festivals could achieve a more authentic inclusion of this type of storytelling

Southern Order of Storytellers, the same guild that was not particularly welcoming to the KSU teller in Harvey (2008), has since provided a model of how including reality storytelling in a festival might be done. During the last five years their festival took place, SOS included an evening performance called “Stories on the Edge of Night,” featuring reality storytellers from

the area. This show was held at Manuel's or other local bar-type venues (off-site from the rest of the festival, which was usually held in a church). Tellers were selected ahead of time, but they were all regulars at Carapace, The Moth, or other local reality shows. Tickets to Stories on the Edge of Night were not too expensive: about \$10. Most importantly, attendees of the SOS festival, including national storytellers, who otherwise never frequented reality storytelling shows, came to Stories on the Edge of Night. Rather than putting reality storytellers on the festival stage, SOS brought the festival audience to reality storytelling. A few years into this arrangement, SOS did go on to feature three reality storytellers at the festival. Their comfort with the festival stage and the audience's comfort with their stories likely grew out of the relationship that had already been forged between SOS and Carapace.

Beyond

They concept of "safe space" may be relevant in numerous other contexts. Businesses may wish to consider how they make customers and employees feel more or less safe. Medical facilities will want patients to feel safe enough to accurately communicate their concerns and needs.

"Safe space" is also worth contemplating beyond physical space. Existing research suggests that some online spaces may be more safe than physical spaces for certain types of conversations, for example, Bond (2007) on gay teen chat rooms. Online interactions can also threaten physical safety, as happens in the case of doxing.

Future research, building on what we have already learned about safety from Carapace, could investigate safety in any area of communication.

APPENDIX A: MESSAGE ABOUT STUDY

Hi Carapeeps! For those who don't know me, my name is Sarah Beth Nelson. In addition to being a Carapace alum I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina. I am investigating what I call "reality storytelling," basically, what y'all are doing at Carapace.

This study will attempt to better define reality storytelling by taking a deep look at one community, yours.

I have already spoken with Randy Osborn and Joyce Mitchell (creators and hosts of Carapace) and have their blessing to conduct this research. I will be conducting ethnographic observations at Manuel's during the shows. I will not include any identifying information about any individuals without obtaining permission.

With permission, I also plan to audio record interviews and conversations with Carapace attendees.

For more information please contact me by email at sbnelson@live.unc.edu.

This study has been approved by the UNC Chapel Hill Institutional Review Board for Social and Behavioral Research. If you have questions or concerns about this study please contact the IRB at 919-966-3113 or by email at irb_questions@unc.edu. You can also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Brian Sturm, at sturm@ils.unc.edu, with any questions or concerns about this study.

APPENDIX B: LIVE EXPLANATION

I will be conducting ethnographic observations at Carapace over the next several months for a study on reality storytelling. I will also audio record conversations and interviews with Carapace attendees, with permission. If you want to know more about this study, please come talk to me after the show. I also have cards available over by the hat [where volunteers sign up to tell a story] as well as a printout which includes a more detailed explanation.

APPENDIX C: ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION GUIDE

Time of arrival:

Physical space

Lighting

Decorations

Layout

Equipment related to show

Audience

Arrangement of audience at tables

Side conversations as able to hear

Before show

During show

After show

Audience reactions during show

(make note of teller being reacted to)

Wait staff

Interruptions or distractions

Reactions

Interaction with story

Changes in makeup of audience as people come and go during show

Stage

Name of each teller

Brief description of each story

Note on any comments about motivation for selecting story

Note on other editorial comments about story

Note on how teller uses body

Note on how teller interacts with context

Note on significant introductions or reactions by MC

Sound booth

Behavior of hosts and MC

Outside environment

Weather

Traffic

Time of departure:

APPENDIX D: CARAPACE CREATOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This is a semi-structured interview. Not all questions will be asked of all participants.

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
 - a. What experiences did you have with storytelling as a child and/or previous to beginning MothUp?
 - b. Tell me about some of your other leisure activities and hobbies.
2. Tell me about how you started MothUp.
 - a. How did you get the idea?
 - b. What were you hoping to accomplish?
 - c. What were the first few months like?
 - d. Why do you think people are drawn to this event?
3. Tell me about Carapace's online and physical presence.
 - a. Where do members of the community interact online?
 - b. Does Carapace have an online presence besides Facebook?
 - c. Where else should I be, to interact with the Carapace community?
 - d. Are there other times and places where members of this community gather that I should consider attending?
4. Tell me about Manuel's
 - a. Why this space?
 - b. What does this space mean to you?
 - c. What does it mean to others?
5. How do you create a performance space?

- a. Why a microphone?
 - b. Have you made conscious decisions about the lighting?
- 6. How do you define what you do at Carapace?
- 7. Who comes to Carapace? (Madison, 2012, p. 30)
- 8. What do people tell stories about?
 - a. Themes you see repeatedly
 - b. What do they share here that they don't share other places?
 - c. What stories do people come to hear?
- 9. How are stories told here?
- 10. How do people listen here?
- 11. How have different stories at Carapace made you feel? (Madison, 2012, p. 30)
- 12. What value (Madison, 2012, p. 30) do you believe Carapace has to the attendees, to this community?
- 13. What advice would you give to someone wanting to start a show like this one?
(Madison, 2012, p. 32)
- 14. What else do you think I should ask you?

APPENDIX E: CARAPACE ATTENDEE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This is a semi-structured interview. Not all questions will be asked of all participants.

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
 - a. What experiences did you have with storytelling as a child and/or previous to attending Carapace?
 - b. Tell me about some of your other leisure activities and hobbies.
 - c. What else do you do in this (physical) area (near Manuel's)?
2. Tell me about how you started coming to Carapace.
 - a. How did you first hear about Carapace (or MothUp)?
 - b. What made you decide to come?
 - c. What keeps you coming back?
 - d. Where do you travel from to get here?
3. Tell me about Manuel's
 - a. What does this space mean to you?
 - b. What does it mean to others?
4. What does Carapace mean to you?
5. What do people tell stories about?
 - a. Themes you see repeatedly
 - b. What do they share here that they don't share other places?
 - c. What stories do people come to hear?
6. What is it like to tell a story at Carapace?
7. How do you prepare to tell a story at Carapace?

8. How have different stories at Carapace made you feel? (Madison, 2012, p. 30)
9. How are stories told here?
10. How do people listen here?
11. How do you define what happens at Carapace?
12. Who comes to Carapace? (Madison, 2012, p. 30)
13. Walk me through the bodily experience of coming to Carapace. (Madison, 2012, p. 30)
 - a. See
 - b. Hear
 - c. Taste
 - d. Smell
 - e. Touch
14. Tell me about being in the performance space.
15. How do you feel about and/or use the microphone as a performer?
16. How do you feel about the microphone as a listener?
 - a. The lights?
 - b. The stage area?
17. I have noticed _____ behavior. (e.g. How people decide where to sit. Alone, with others.) (Madison, 2012)
 - a. Tell me more about this
 - b. Tell me about other ways that people _____ (create their own space within this space)
18. What advice would you give to a new storyteller at Carapace? (Madison, 2012, p. 32)
19. What else do you think I should ask you?

APPENDIX F: EDITED INTERVIEW GUIDES

August 2017 Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
 - a. What experiences did you have with storytelling as a child and/or previous to attending Carapace?
 - b. Tell me about some of your other leisure activities and hobbies.
 - c. What else do you do in this (physical) area (near Manuel's)?
2. Tell me about how you started coming to Carapace.
 - a. How did you first hear about Carapace (or MothUp)?
 - b. What made you decide to come?
 - c. What keeps you coming back?
 - d. Where do you travel from to get here?
3. Tell me about Manuel's
 - a. What does this space mean to you?
 - b. What does it mean to others?
 - c. What makes Manuel's feel like a safe space (or not)?
4. What does Carapace mean to you?
5. What do people tell stories about?
 - a. Themes you see repeatedly
 - b. What do they share here that they don't share other places?
 - c. What stories do people come to hear?
6. What is it like to tell a story at Carapace?
 - a. Are you talking to strangers or friends?
 - b. How has this changed over time?

7. How do you prepare to tell a story at Carapace?
8. How have different stories at Carapace made you feel? (Madison, 2012, p. 30)
9. How are stories told here?
10. How do people listen here?
11. How do you define what happens at Carapace?
12. Who comes to Carapace? (Madison, 2012, p. 30)
13. Walk me through the bodily experience of coming to Carapace. (Madison, 2012, p. 30) -
senses
14. Tell me about being in the performance space.
15. How do you feel about and/or use the microphone as a performer?
16. How do you feel about the microphone (lights, stage) as a listener?
17. I have noticed _____ behavior. (e.g. How people decide where to sit. Alone, with
others.) (Madison, 2012)
 - a. Tell me more about this
 - b. Tell me about other ways that people _____ (create their own space within this
space)
18. What advice would you give to a new storyteller at Carapace? (Madison, 2012, p. 32)
19. What else do you think I should ask you?
20. Who else should I talk to?

Cris Gray (September 2017) Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
 - a. What experiences did you have with storytelling as a child and/or previous to attending Carapace?
 - b. Tell me about some of your other leisure activities and hobbies.
 - c. What else do you do in this (physical) area (near Manuel's)?
2. Tell me about how you started MCing for Carapace.
3. Tell me about Manuel's
 - a. What does this space mean to you?
 - b. What does it mean to others?
 - c. What makes Manuel's feel like a safe space (or not)?
4. What does Carapace mean to you?
5. What do people tell stories about?
 - a. Themes you see repeatedly
 - b. What do they share here that they don't share other places?
 - c. What kind of stories do you best like to hear?
 - d. If you heard a story at Carapace and later found out, from the teller or someone else, that it was not true, what would your reaction be?
6. What is the role of the MC at Carapace?
 - a. What "rules" do you lay down before the show?
 - b. What's going on in your head during stories?
7. What is it like to tell a story at Carapace?

- a. Are you talking to strangers or friends?
 - b. Last month, your story was about people not knowing you. If felt like you were introducing the Carapace crowd to a part of you they didn't already know. Could you talk about that?
 - c. People laughed at inappropriate times in your story last month. What are your thoughts on that?
- 8. How do you prepare to tell a story at Carapace?
 - 9. Tell me about a story that especially moved you.
 - 10. How are stories told here?
 - 11. How do people listen here?
 - 12. How do you define what happens at Carapace?
 - 13. Who comes to Carapace? (Madison, 2012, p. 30)
 - 14. Tell me about friendships you've made at Carapace.
 - 15. Walk me through the bodily experience of coming to Carapace. (Madison, 2012, p. 30) - senses
 - 16. Tell me about being in the performance space.
 - 17. How do you feel about and/or use the microphone as MC?
 - 18. What advice would you give to a new storyteller at Carapace? (Madison, 2012, p. 32)
 - 19. What else do you think I should ask you?
 - 20. Who else should I talk to?

September 2017 Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
 - a. What experiences did you have with storytelling as a child and/or previous to attending Carapace?
 - b. Tell me about some of your other leisure activities and hobbies.
 - c. What else do you do in this (physical) area (near Manuel's)?
2. Tell me about how you started coming to Carapace.
 - a. How did you first hear about Carapace (or MothUp)?
 - b. What made you decide to come?
 - c. What keeps you coming back?
 - d. Where do you travel from to get here?
3. Tell me about Manuel's
 - a. What does this space mean to you?
 - b. What does it mean to others?
 - c. What makes Manuel's feel like a safe space (or not)?
4. What does Carapace mean to you?
5. What do people tell stories about?
 - a. Themes you see repeatedly
 - b. What do they share here that they don't share other places?
 - c. What kind of stories do you best like to hear?
 - d. If you heard a story at Carapace and later found out, from the teller or someone else, that it was not true, what would your reaction be?
6. What is it like to tell a story at Carapace?
 - a. Are you talking to strangers or friends?

- b. How has this changed over time?
7. How do you prepare to tell a story at Carapace?
 8. Have you ever regretted telling a story?
 9. Tell me about a story that especially moved you.
 10. How are stories told here?
 11. How do people listen here?
 12. How do you define what happens at Carapace?
 13. Who comes to Carapace? (Madison, 2012, p. 30)
 14. Tell me about friendships you've made at Carapace.
 15. Walk me through the bodily experience of coming to Carapace. (Madison, 2012, p. 30) -
senses
 16. Tell me about being in the performance space.
 17. How do you feel about and/or use the microphone as a performer?
 18. How do you feel about the microphone (lights, stage) as a listener?
 19. What advice would you give to a new storyteller at Carapace? (Madison, 2012, p. 32)
 20. What else do you think I should ask you?
 21. Who else should I talk to?

October 2017 Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
 - a. What experiences did you have with storytelling as a child and/or previous to attending Carapace?
 - b. Tell me about some of your other leisure activities and hobbies.
 - c. What else do you do in this (physical) area (near Manuel's)?
 - d. What do you do for a living?
2. Tell me about how you started coming to Carapace.
 - a. How did you first hear about Carapace (or MothUp)?
 - b. What made you decide to come?
 - c. What keeps you coming back?
 - d. Where do you travel from to get here?
3. Tell me about Manuel's
 - a. What does this space mean to you?
 - b. What does it mean to others?
 - c. What makes Manuel's feel like a safe space (or not)?
4. What does Carapace mean to you?
5. What do people tell stories about?
 - a. Themes you see repeatedly
 - b. What do they share here that they don't share other places?
 - c. If you heard a story at Carapace and later found out, from the teller or someone else, that it was not true, what would your reaction be?
6. Tell me about your favorite story from tonight (or a recent show). Why is it a favorite?
7. Being a storyteller

- a. Are you talking to strangers or friends? How has this changed over time?
 - b. How do you prepare to tell a story at Carapace?
 - c. Have you ever regretted telling a story?
 - d. How do you perform while telling a story?
 - e. When Carapace was being recorded, how did that change the way you would tell stories?
 - f. What does it feel like, physically, to tell a story?
 - g. To get audience feedback during the story?
 - h. Do you feel that what is said at Carapace stays at Carapace? Why or why not?
8. Being a listener
- a. How do people listen here?
 - b. What does it feel like, physically, to hear a story?
 - c. Tell me about a time when you were uncomfortable as a listener.
 - d. Tell me about a time you were listening with expectations that were not met.
 - e. When Carapace was being recorded how did that change the listening experience?
9. Who comes to Carapace? (Madison, 2012, p. 30)
10. Tell me about a time you talked to someone about their story after the show/someone talked to you about your story.
11. What advice would you give to a new storyteller at Carapace? (Madison, 2012, p. 32)
12. What else do you think I should ask you?
13. Who else should I talk to?

January 2018 Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
 - a. What experiences did you have with storytelling previous to attending Carapace?
 - b. Tell me about some of your other leisure activities and hobbies.
 - c. What else do you do in this (physical) area (near Manuel's)?
 - d. What do you do for a living?
2. Tell me about how you started coming to Carapace.
 - a. How did you first hear about Carapace (or MothUp)?
 - b. What made you decide to come?
 - c. What keeps you coming back?
 - d. Where do you travel from to get here?
3. Tell me about Manuel's
 - a. What does this space mean to you?
 - b. What does it mean to others?
 - c. What makes Manuel's feel like a safe space (or not)?
4. What does Carapace mean to you?
5. What do people tell stories about?
 - a. Themes you see repeatedly
 - b. What do they share here that they don't share other places?
 - c. If you heard a story at Carapace and later found out, from the teller or someone else, that it was not true, what would your reaction be?
6. What happens when people break the rules?
7. Tell me about your favorite story from tonight (or a recent show). Why is it a favorite?
8. Being a storyteller

- a. Have you ever regretted telling a story?
 - b. How do you perform while telling a story?
 - c. When Carapace was being recorded, how did that change the way you would tell stories?
 - d. What does it feel like, physically, to tell a story?
 - e. To get audience feedback during the story?
9. Being a listener
- a. How do people listen here?
 - b. What does it feel like, physically, to hear a story?
 - c. Tell me about a time when you were uncomfortable as a listener.
 - d. Tell me about a time you were listening with expectations that were not met.
 - e. Tell me about connecting with the storyteller and/or the story.
10. Who comes to Carapace? (Madison, 2012, p. 30)
11. Tell me about a time you talked to someone about their story after the show/someone talked to you about your story.
12. What advice would you give to a new storyteller at Carapace? (Madison, 2012, p. 32)
13. What else do you think I should ask you?
14. Who else should I talk to?

REFERENCES

- Aleksandrowicz, F. J. (1973). *This old house with its friendly porch needs a fresh coat of paint and repair work - Nara - 550109.jpg* [JPG]. Retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=17100477>
- Alexander Craft, R. (2015). *When the devil knocks: The Congo tradition and the politics of blackness in twentieth-century Panama*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press.
- Alghoul, A. (2011). *Asma5.jpg* [JPG]. Retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15687920>
- Arao, B., & Clemens, K. (2013). From safe spaces to brave spaces: A new way to frame dialogue around diversity and social justice. In L. M. Landreman (Ed.), *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators* (pp. 135–150). Sterling, Virginia: Stylus.
- Bauman, R. (1977). *Verbal art as performance*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers.
- Bergner, B. A. (2013). *The poetics of stage space: The theory and process of theatre scene design*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company.
- Bergson, H. (2000). *Creative Evolution*. ElecBook.
- Bond, B. J. (2007). Out online: The content and context of gay teen chat rooms. Presented at the NCA 93rd Annual Convention, Chicago, IL.
- Booth, E. O. (1987). Researcher as participant: Collaborative evaluation in a primary school. *Education and Urban Society*, 20(1), 55–85.
- Bradley, M. (2009). Natural selective attention: Orienting and emotion. *Psychophysiology*, 46, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8986.2008.00702.x>
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519–531. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>
- Carapace. (2011). *Carapace* [JPG]. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/156546534411045/photos/a.156591041073261/156613421071023/?type=1&theater>
- Carapace. (2017). [JPG]. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/156546534411045/photos/rpp.156546534411045/1345166075549079/?type=3&theater>
- Chancellor, R. L. (2017). Libraries as pivotal community spaces in times of crisis. *Urban Library Journal*, 23(1), 1–15.

- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Colley, R. (2011). Carapace [Facebook]. Retrieved October 4, 2016, from <https://www.facebook.com/Carapace-156546534411045/>
- Colman, A. M. (2015). Figure-ground reversal. *A Dictionary of Psychology* (p. 280). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Colman, A. M. (2015). Reversible goblet. *A Dictionary of Psychology* (pp. 658–659). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Conquergood, D. (2016). *Cultural struggles: Performance, ethnography, praxis*. (E. P. Johnson, Ed.). Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Cox, A., Griffin, B. L., & Hartel, J. (2017). What every body knows: Embodied information in serious leisure. *Journal of Documentation*, 73(3), 1–28. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-06-2016-0073>
- Day, R. E. (2000). The “conduit metaphor” and the nature and politics of information studies. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 51(9), 805–811.
- Day, R. E. (2010). The self-imposed limits of library and information science: Remarks on the discipline, on the profession, on the university, and on the state of “information” in the U.S. at large today. *Interactions: UCLS Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 6(2), 1–15.
- Garcia, A. C., Standlee, A. I., Bechkoff, J., & Cui, Y. (2009). Ethnographic approaches to the Internet and computer-mediated communication. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 38(1), 52–84. <http://doi.org/doi: 10.1177/0891241607310839>
- Georges, R. A. (1969). Toward and understanding of storytelling events. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 82(326), 313–328. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/539777>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.
- Goffman, E. (1986). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press.
- Hamera, J. (2016). Response-ability, vulnerability, and other(s') bodies. In E. P. Johnson (Ed.), *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis* (pp. 306–309). Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Harvey, H. B. (2008). On the edge of the storytelling world: The festival circuit and the fringe. *Storytelling, Self, Society*, 4(2), 134–151. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41949007>

- Huron, Jay. (2016). Storytelling 20151003-12: Peter Cook. [Photograph]. Retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/storytellingcenter/26581363185/in/album-72157667261985032/>
- International Storytelling Center. (2019). Story slam! Retrieved from <https://www.storytellingcenter.net/festival/special-events/story-slam/>
- Jackson, S. (2003). *Lines of activity: Performance, historiography, Hull-House domesticity*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Langellier, K. M., & Peterson, E. E. (2004). *Storytelling in daily life: Performing narrative*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lavie, N. (2005). Distracted and confused?: Selective attention under load. *TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences*, 9(2), 75–83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2004.12.004>
- Linett, P. (2013). Interview: Ben Lillie on science and the storytelling revival. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 56(1), 15-19.
- Lloyd, A. (2010). Corporeality and practice theory: Exploring emerging research agendas for information literacy. *Information Research*, 15(3).
- Madison, D. S. (2012). *Critical ethnography: Methods, ethics, and performance* (Second). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Malinowski, B. (1922). *Argonauts of the western Pacific: An account of native enterprise and adventure in the archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge.
- McAuley, G. (1999). *Space in performance: Making meaning in the theatre*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- McLuhan, M. (2003). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. (W. T. Gordon, Ed.). Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press.
- McLuhan, M., & Fiore, Q. (2001). *The medium is the message: An inventory of effects*. Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press.
- McLuhan, M., & McLuhan, E. (1988). *Laws of media: The new science*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Michels, D. H. (2012). Seeking God's will: The experience of information seeking by leaders of a church in transition. *Canadian Journal of Information & Library Sciences*, 36(1/2), 16–27.
- Miller, S. (1987). Monitoring and blunting: Validation of a questionnaire to assess styles of information seeking under threat. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52(2), 345–353.

- Mithen, S. (2006). *The singing neanderthals: The origins of music, language, mind, and body*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- The Moth. (2018). The Moth. Retrieved from <https://themoth.org/>
- National Storytelling Network. (2019). Summit performances. Retrieved from <https://storynet.org/nsnevents/conference/summit-performances/>
- Olsson, M. R. (2010). The play's the thing: Theater professionals make sense of Shakespeare. *Library & Information Science Research*, 32, 272–280. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2010.07.009>
- Olsson, M. (2016). Making sense of the past: The embodied information practices of field archaeologists. *Journal of Information Science*, 42(3), 410–419. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165551515621839>
- Olsson, M., & Lloyd, A. (2017a). Being in place: Embodied information practices. *Information Research*, 22(1). Retrieved from <http://www.informationr.net/ir/22-1/colis/colis1601.html>
- Olsson, M., & Lloyd, A. (2017b). Losing the art and craft of know-how: Capturing vanishing embodied knowledge in the 21st century. *Information Research*, 22(4), 1–12.
- Ong, W. J. (2008). *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word*. New York: Routledge.
- Pang, N. (2014). Crisis-based information seeking: monitoring versus blunting in the information seeking behaviour of working students during the Southeast Asian haze crisis. *Information Research*, 19(4).
- Pariser, E. (2011). *The filter bubble: What the internet is hiding from you*. New York: The Penguin Press.
- Rama. (n.d.). *Sat-expression-1600.jpg* [JPG]. Retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=726716>
- Reddy, M. J. (1979). The conduit metaphor: A case of frame conflict in our language about language. In A. Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and Thought* (pp. 284–324). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Schechner, R. (2002). *Performance studies: An introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- Smith, J. (2008). *Vocal tracks: Performance and sound media*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- Sobol, J. D. (1999). *The storyteller's journey: An American revival*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

- Strabo. (1903). *The Geography of Strabo*. (H. C. Hamilton & W. Falconer, Trans.). London: George Bell & Sons. Retrieved from <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.01.0239>
- Sturm, B. W. (2000). The "storylistening" trance experience. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 113(449), 287–304.
- Sweeny, K., Melnyk, D., Miller, W., & Shepperd, J. A. (2010). Information avoidance: Who, what, when, and why. *Review of General Psychology*, 14(4), 340–353. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021288>
- Thompson, R. C. (2010). "Am I going to see a ghost tonight?": Gettysburg ghost tours and the performance of belief. *The Journal of American Culture*, 33(2), 79–91.
- Turner, D. (2010). Orally-based information. *Journal of Documentation*, 66(3), 370–383. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00220411011038458>
- Turner, V. (1988). *The anthropology of performance*. New York: PAJ Publications.
- Whitten, S. (2018, April 6). Why "safe spaces" at universities are a threat to free speech. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/why-safe-spaces-at-universities-are-a-threat-to-free-speech-94547>
- Wise, H. (2000). *I, Claudius* [DVD].